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Special Bimonthly FORB Digest (16-31.12.2020)

30.12.20 - Jehovah's Witnesses under the yoke of repression: results of 2020

Link to full text in Russian: jw-russia.org/news/2020/12/11.html

How many people were repressed for their faith in 2020. As of December 30, 2020, 427 followers of the religion of Jehovah's Witnesses are officially accused, suspected, defendant, convicted or acquitted.

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29.12.20 - Police detain dissident Orthodox figure

Link to full text in Russian: <https://tass.ru/proisshestviya/10372533>

After having seized the Central Urals convent and been expelled from the church, the former schema monk Sergius Romanov was arrested in order to give evidence. This was reported to TASS by a source in law enforcement agencies. According to the source, he was arrested for questioning because of a video recording posted on YouTube in which Sergius urges his devotees to "die for Russia."

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29.12.20 - A Primorye prosecutor requested six-and-a-half year imprisonment for the 77-year-old believer Vladimir Filippov

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2020/12/10.html>

On December 29, 2020, the Nadezhdinsky District Court held a hearing in the criminal case against a former military officer from the village of Razdolnoye.

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24.12.20 - The Tambov region becomes a 59th region in which Jehovah's Witnesses are persecuted

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2020/12/9.html>

In the morning of December 24, 2020, at least two searches of believers were carried out in the city of Kirsanov, Tambov Region. Details are being specified.

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22.12.20 - Another verdict for practicing faith: a three-and-a-half year suspended sentence for the 23-year-old Rostov-on-Don-based Semyon Baybak

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2020/12/8.html>

A conscientious objector, whose faith does not allow him to take up arms, was convicted under "extremist" articles 282.2 and 282.3 of the Criminal Code of the Russian

Federation. Vladimir Barvin, a Leninskiy District Court judge, issued the verdict on December 21, 2020.

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22.12.20 - Jehovah's Witnesses to appeal their convictions in south Russia

Link to full text in Russian: <https://www.kavkaz-uzel.media/articles/357860/>

Jehovah's Witnesses from Rostov-on-Don Semen Baibak, who was given a three and a half years suspended sentence, and Ruslan Alyev, who was given a two and a half years suspended sentence, do not agree with the verdicts and intend to appeal them, their associates report.

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21.12.20 - About hundred new Orthodox churches opened in Moscow

Moscow, December 21, Interfax - Almost a hundred Orthodox churches have been built in Moscow over the past decade, the administrator of Program-200, State Duma deputy Vladimir Resin told *Interfax* on Monday.

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19.12.20 - Relatively light, but unjustified, sentences for Jehovah's Witnesses in south Russia

Link to full text in Russian: <https://www.kavkaz-uzel.media/articles/357758/>

A court in Sochi found Jehovah's Witnesses Viacheslav Popov and Nikolai Kuzichkin guilty of arranging the activity of an extremist organization. Popov was sentenced to one year and ten months in a penal colony and Kuzichkin to a year and a month incarceration. Taking into account time spend in detention, Kuzichkin was released from serving the sentence..

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18.12.20 - Sochi-based believers Kuzichkin and Popov were sentenced to imprisonment but were released due to having, in effect, completed their sentence

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2020/12/6.html>

On December 18, 2020, Yuriy Pilipenko, a judge of the Khostinsky district court, found two Sochi residents guilty of organizing the activities of an extremist organization because of their religion.

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18.12.20 - Woman Jehovah's Witness spends 14 months in prison without trial

Link to full text in Russian: <https://cutt.ly/8jrLH8F>

Alevtina Bagratian spent a year and two months in custody in a SIZO. Her husband, Artem, who is ill with diabetes, was left behind bars.

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18.12.20 - Kursk Jehovah's witness left in Sizo

Link to full text in Russian: <https://kursk46.com/news/13086-kurskogo-svidetelja-iegovy-ostavili-v-sizo.html>

The period in a SIZO was extended for members of the Kursk division of the Jehovah's Witnesses sect. The Lenin district court ordered to extend the detention of Artem Bagratian until 11 July.

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17.12.20 - A Rostov-on-Don sentence for practicing faith: one of Jehovah's Witnesses, Ruslan Alyyev, 33, was handed a two-and-a-half year suspended sentence

On 17 December 2020, Vladimir Stokov, judge of the Leninskiy District Court of Rostov-on-Don, found a law-abiding believer guilty of participating in the activities of a banned organization just because he observes the customs of his religion: he reads the Bible and recommends it to others.

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17.12.20 - Court sentences for mere membership in Jehovah's Witnesses congregation

Link to full text in Russian: <https://www.kavkaz-uzel.media/articles/357712/>

A court in Rostov-on-Don sentenced Jehovah's Witness Ruslan Alyev to a two years and six months suspended sentence, having found him to be a member of an extremist organization.

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17.12.20 - Russian president repeats his objection to hurting believers' feelings

Link to full text in Russian: <https://credo.press/234702/>

"In our country, nobody is allowed to make offensive attacks upon one confession or another. This would destroy the country from within and I ask everybody not to do this," Vladimir Putin declared at his big press conference on 17 December, responding to a RT correspondent's question about terrorism and caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad. The journalist asked him to point out the line "between freedom of speech and offending believers."

[Continue reading...](#)

16.12.20 - A Novosibirsk court sentenced 66-year-old Yuriy Savelyev, one of Jehovah's Witnesses, to six years in prison.

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2020/12/4.html>

Leninsky District Court of Novosibirsk judge Yekaterina Kashina sentenced Yuriy Savelyev to six years in a general regime colony for believing in Jehovah God on December 16, 2020.

[Continue reading...](#)

Six years in prison for a Jehovah's Witness

By Willy Fautré, director of Human Rights Without Frontiers

HRWF (26.12.2020) - On 16 December, the Leninskiy District Court of Novosibirsk (Siberia) sentenced Yuriy Savelyev, 66, to six years in prison under Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 1 ("Organisation of the activities of a banned extremism organisation"). Prosecutors had asked the court to sentence him to eight years in prison.

On 8 November 2018, police raided ten homes of Jehovah's Witnesses, including Savelyev's. Two days later, he was put in pretrial detention. Despite multiple appeals for his release due to his age and health conditions, his detention term was extended nine times, until his trial.

Savelyev's prison term should be served in a penal colony of ordinary regime. Additionally, he will be deprived of the right to occupy a leadership post for a period of three years.

In 2017, Russia's Supreme Court ruled the Jehovah's Witnesses organization to be extremist, ordered the liquidation of its Administrative Centre and their 395 religious communities, and banned their activities nationwide.

This decision was followed by a crackdown which has seen dozens of adherents jailed and hundreds hit with criminal charges.

Savelyev and fifteen coreligionists registered a Jehovah's Witnesses community in the capital of Siberia in the late 1990s. Until the time of his arrest, the convict conducted, with his associates, religious worship services.

Jarrold Lopes, spokesman for Jehovah's Witnesses, said in an official press release: "Convicting Yuriy, a peaceful 66-year-old Christian, to six years in prison is patently absurd. It also defies international human rights norms, which is why the European Union, Great-Britain, the United States and the United Nations have repeatedly called on Russia to stop the systematic persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses. Yet, Russian authorities have persisted, raiding over 440 homes of Jehovah's Witnesses already this year. Undeterred even by COVID-19, Russian authorities continue to unconscionably subject harmless believers, including older men like Yuriy, to the unsanitary and potentially deadly confines of prison."

His sentence is not only unjustified but is extreme for Russia, considering that [kidnapping](#) is punishable up to five years in prison and [rape](#), three to six years.

Only two other Witnesses, [Dennis Christensen](#) (since May 25, 2017) and [Sergey Klimov](#) (since June 4, 2018), have spent more time behind bars since the 2017 Supreme Court ruling.

This year personnel of various state agencies have conducted more than 440 searches in homes of adherents of Jehovah's Witnesses throughout the country, despite the coronavirus pandemic.

Savelyev is currently the oldest Jehovah's Witness in prison.

His lawyer, Vitaliy Svintsov, told Reuters that Savelyev would appeal the decision.

Since the ban in spring 2017, 1240 Witnesses' homes have been raided and criminal investigation has been opened in 423 cases. There are now 45 Witnesses behind bars and barbed wires: 10 were convicted and 35 in pretrial detention. [Over 220](#) have served time in pretrial detention and 31 under house arrest.

"A fresh bloody wound on his forehead"

During 24 November raids by Investigative Committee officials, Police, FSB and National Guard on Jehovah's Witnesses in Moscow, armed officials hit Vardan Zakaryan in the head with a rifle butt, resulting in his two-day hospitalisation. Officers assaulted a neighbour before locating and hitting another targeted Jehovah's Witness. Officials in these and earlier torture cases refused to explain or failed to respond to Forum 18 why the suspected torturers have not been arrested and prosecuted.

By Victoria Arnold

Forum18 (16.12.2020) - <https://bit.ly/37q2AcE> - More Jehovah's Witnesses have been tortured during raids on their homes by Investigative Committee officials, Police, the FSB security service and the National Guard, according to Jehovah's Witnesses. During one of several 24 November raids in Moscow, armed officials hit Vardan Zakaryan in the head with a rifle butt, resulting in his hospitalisation for two days.

"Entering the living room, I saw a 10 centimetre [4 inch] bloodstain on the floor, and my dad was lying on the couch with a fresh bloody wound on his forehead," Zakaryan's daughter said. "He was pale and trembling all over" (see below).

In a raid on another household, officials first assaulted a neighbour of their intended target by mistake. They then forced a male Jehovah's Witness to the floor with a gun at his back, twisting his arms, and hitting him, Jehovah's Witnesses said. In yet another household, officials threatened to strip two women "and put them out on the street" (see below).

Zakaryan and four fellow Jehovah's Witnesses are now the subjects of the first criminal case on "extremism"-related charges against Jehovah's Witnesses in Moscow (see below).

Zakaryan has complained to Moscow's Prosecutor's Office and to the Moscow Human Rights Ombudsperson about his treatment, but it remains unknown whether any measures will be taken against the perpetrators (see below).

Many Jehovah's Witnesses and a Muslim who reads the works of the late Turkish theologian Said Nursi have suffered torture, either during arrest and interrogation, or upon arrival at a prison camp after they are convicted and their sentences come into force. Contrary to Russia's obligations under the UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, no investigator or prison official is yet known to have been arrested or put on criminal trial for committing or allowing torture (see below).

At least 86 searches between late October and mid-December

Officials launched at least 86 searches of Jehovah's Witness homes across 16 regions of Russia between late October and mid-December alone. These are thought to have resulted in 13 criminal cases against at least 26 people (see forthcoming article)

In total, more than 400 Jehovah's Witnesses remain under investigation, are on trial, or have been convicted since Russia's Supreme Court ordered the liquidation of their Administrative Centre as an "extremist organisation" in 2017 and banned its activities nationwide.

Most recently, on 16 December 2020, Yury Prokopyevich Savelyev (born 1 January 1954) became the oldest Jehovah's Witness to receive a prison term, when Lenin District Court in Novosibirsk handed him a six-year sentence under Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 1 ("Organisation of the activities of a banned extremism organisation").

Muslims who read the works of the late Turkish theologian Said Nursi face similar raids and prosecution on "extremism"-related charges.

Eight Jehovah's Witnesses and one Muslim Nursi reader are serving labour camp terms as "extremists". Of 26 Jehovah's Witnesses convicted of "extremism" charges since late July 2020, eight were given jail terms and 16 suspended sentences, while two were fined.

Ignoring international obligations

The United Nations (UN) Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment defines torture as "any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person for such purposes as obtaining from him or a third person information or a confession, punishing him for an act he or a third person has committed or is suspected of having committed, or intimidating or coercing him or a third person, or for any reason based on discrimination of any kind, when such pain or suffering is inflicted by or at the instigation of or with the consent or acquiescence of a public official or other person acting in an official capacity".

Under the Convention, Russia is obliged to both "take him [sic] into custody or take other legal measures to ensure his [sic] presence" any person suspected on good grounds of having committed torture, and also try them under criminal law which makes "these offences punishable by appropriate penalties which take into account their grave nature".

Torture nevertheless remains common. The UN Committee Against Torture's (CAT) Concluding Observations (CAT/C/RUS/CO/6) on Russia, released in August 2018, stated: "The Committee is deeply concerned at numerous reliable reports of the practice of torture and ill-treatment in the State party, including as a means to extract confessions,

and at many recent reports documenting cases of torture. .. The Committee is also concerned at reports that allegations of torture rarely resulted in criminal prosecutions and that, even when prosecuted, the perpetrators were charged with simple assault or abuse of authority". The CAT also urged Russia "to combat impunity in torture and ill-treatment cases".

The UN Committee made its remarks after video footage emerged of guards using truncheons to beat Yevgeny Makarov, an inmate at Yaroslavl's Correctional Colony No. 8, and pouring water over his head as he lay on a table. There have been many other examples of abuse within Russia's security apparatus in recent years.

One in 10 people who replied to a survey of 3,447 adults from across Russia said they had been tortured by police and other security officials, according to a survey published on 27 June 2019 by the Levada Centre, an independent Moscow-based polling body. Three-quarters of adults who said they had suffered torture stated that they had been tortured to humiliate or intimidate them, half that they had been tortured to extract confessions, and a third that they had been tortured as a punishment.

Jehovah's Witnesses and one Muslim who reads Nursi's works have been tortured, but no suspect torturer is known to have been arrested or put on criminal trial.

Moscow raid leaves one man with head injury

The first criminal prosecutions of Jehovah's Witnesses in the capital Moscow after the 2017 ban began early in the morning of 24 November, when Investigative Committee officials arrived to search about 20 households, accompanied by armed police, National Guard troops, and members of the FSB security service. Investigators had had the Jehovah's Witnesses under surveillance for "many months", according to Jehovah's Witnesses.

At several Moscow addresses officials broke down doors, the jw-russia.org news website stated on 9 December. Electronic devices, cash, bank cards, personal documents, cassettes, and in one household "even a calculator" were confiscated.

Officials also tortured two men, leaving one requiring hospitalisation for a head injury. Several people were taken away for questioning, during which some were threatened with prison and having their children taken away. Three men have been charged and two more named as suspects under 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").

At the home of the Zakaryan family, officials knocked on the door at 6 am in the morning. As soon as Vardan Zakaryan opened it, one of them hit him in the head with a rifle butt, knocking him down, Jehovah's Witnesses stated on 30 November. Zakaryan's wife (who, along with their daughter, is not a Jehovah's Witness) was ordered to lie on the floor.

"Entering the living room, I saw a 10 centimetre [4 inch] bloodstain on the floor, and my dad was lying on the couch with a fresh bloody wound on his forehead," Zakaryan's daughter told Jehovah's Witnesses. "He was pale and trembling all over."

An ambulance took Zakaryan to hospital under guard, where he remained for two days before being discharged "at the insistence of security officials". Investigative Committee investigator Dmitry Smadich then interrogated him overnight.

Smadich charged Zakaryan under Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 1. Zakaryan also appears to be under investigation under Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 1.1 ("Inclination, recruitment or other involvement of a person in an extremist organisation").

On 27 November, a court extended Zakaryan's time in temporary detention (normally 48 hours). At the temporary detention centre, Jehovah's Witnesses state, "they exerted strong psychological pressure on him, trying to force him to incriminate his fellow believers and take the blame for extremism".

Moscow's Presna District Court ordered on 30 November that Zakaryan should be placed under house arrest until 23 January 2021.

Will torture complaints lead to arrests and prosecutions?

Upon his release from the temporary detention centre, Zakaryan filed complaints about his treatment with Moscow City Prosecutor's Office and Moscow Human Rights Ombudsperson Tatyana Potayeva.

Forum 18 wrote to the Moscow FSB and the Moscow National Guard on 7 December, asking why their officials had used violence towards an unarmed man, whether those involved were still on duty, and whether their actions would be investigated. Forum 18 received no reply from the Moscow FSB or the Moscow National Guard by the end of the working day in Moscow on 16 December.

Forum 18 wrote to Moscow City Prosecutor's Office and the Ombudsperson's Office on 7 and 8 December, asking whether the torture would be investigated and a criminal case opened against the perpetrators.

Moscow City Prosecutor's Office responded to Forum 18 on 14 December, noting that the Investigative Committee is investigating the criminal case against Zakaryan. The response said nothing about any action against those who had tortured him, declaring only that "all appeals arriving at the city Prosecutor's Office are considered under the established procedure and copies of replies are sent to the applicant".

The Human Rights Ombudsperson's press secretary Yelena Lopukhina told Forum 18 on 10 December that her office had received complaints about "the infliction of bodily harm on a 49-year-old citizen and his wife in the course of a search at a residential property". She added that the Ombudsperson's Office would consider the complaints and inform the applicants of the outcome within the established timeframe (30 days).

Other assaults, threats during Moscow raids

During the raids on Jehovah's Witnesses in Moscow on 24 November, armed and masked FSB officers and National Guard troops first assaulted a neighbour of their intended target by mistake, according to Jehovah's Witnesses. The officers then forced a male Jehovah's Witness to the floor with a gun at his back, twisting his arms, and hitting him.

In another household, officers "insulted two female believers, threatening to strip them and put them out on the street", Jehovah's Witnesses stated on 9 December.

No criminal cases appear to have been opened against any of the three people targeted in these raids.

A 33-second video on the Investigative Committee's YouTube channel shows (without commentary) two men in black uniforms and balaclavas forcing open the door of a flat

and pulling it off its hinges. The video then cuts to a few seconds' footage of officials moving through the flat's interior, and ends with an image of bundles of cash lying on a surface, and an open book with its title page blurred out.

Jehovah's Witnesses say that this footage is of the raid on Yury Chernyshev's home, during which he was knocked to the floor and his wife Yekaterina made to stand facing the wall. Officials then placed the two adults and their daughter (who is aged under 18) in separate rooms, forbidding them from speaking to each other. After the nine-hour search, both Yury and Yekaterina were taken away for interrogation, after which she was released and he was sent to a temporary detention centre.

Five targeted in Moscow criminal case

The Moscow Investigative Committee said in a statement on 24 November, the day of the raids, that it is investigating a group of people who "organised the work of a local religious division of this organisation [ie. Jehovah's Witnesses] in the northeast of Moscow" (see forthcoming article).

The criminal case so far involves five people:

- Vardan Pegasovich Zakaryan (born 1971) – charged under Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 1. Six days in temporary detention, then house arrest;
- Ivan Stepanovich Chaykovsky (born 1955) and Yury Yevgenyevich Chernyshev (born 1963) – charged under Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 1. Three days in temporary detention, then house arrest;
- Vitaly Viktorovich Komarov (born 1976) – suspect under Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 1. Three days in temporary detention, then house arrest;
- and Sergey Grigoryevich Shatalov (born 1969) – suspect under Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 1. Three days in temporary detention, then house arrest.

Earlier unpunished cases of torture

Yevgeny Lvovich Kim (born 5 October 1974) was sentenced to three years and nine months' imprisonment in June 2017 for organising meetings to study the works of late Turkish theologian Said Nursi. Between Kim's arrest in December 2015 and his transfer to a labour camp in August 2017, he was detained in Investigation Prison No. 1 in Blagoveshchensk.

While there, Kim was tortured, had his ribs broken, and suffered attempted rape. This took place in "the so-called 'press hut', a special room where the necessary testimonies are beaten out [of inmates] by other detainees who are colluding with the prison administration", a fellow Muslim told Forum 18 in October 2017. No-one is known to have been arrested and put on criminal trial for torturing Kim.

Kim is now in a detention centre for foreign and stateless persons in Khabarovsk, having been deprived of Russian citizenship while serving his prison sentence and detained for violating migration law upon his release in April 2019 (see forthcoming article).

Several other Jehovah's Witnesses have been tortured, either during their arrest and interrogation, or in prison after their sentences came into force. Jehovah's Witness lawyers confirmed to Forum 18 on 8 December that all their applications to initiate criminal proceedings against those suspected of being responsible for torture have been refused, and that none of the victims has received any compensation.

During raids on 40 Jehovah's Witness homes in the Siberian city of Chita in the early morning of 10 February 2020, members of the National Guard arrested Vadim Aleksandrovich Kutsenko (born 1989) and subjected him to beating, choking, and electric shocks. Another detainee said that the National Guard made threats of violence against their family. A medical examination shortly afterwards confirmed the torture of Kutsenko.

Kutsenko spent five days in temporary detention but now appears to be under no restrictions. He remains a suspect under 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").

No-one is known to have been arrested and put on criminal trial for torturing Kutsenko.

Neither the National Guard nor any other state agency in the Transbaikal Region responded to Forum 18's questions about why Kutsenko had been tortured, and when the alleged perpetrators would be arrested and put on criminal trial.

Five Jehovah's Witnesses - Aleksey Budenchuk, Feliks Makhammadiyev, Roman Gridasov, Gennady German, and Aleksey Miretsky - were tortured on arrival at Orenburg Labour Camp No. 1 on 6 February 2020. Guards kicked them and beat them with batons, and took away the gluten-free food given by doctors to Makhammadiyev. As he has coeliac disease, it is essential that he has gluten-free food. All five prisoners of conscience were put in solitary confinement. Makhammadiyev suffered a broken rib and a damaged kidney, and was hospitalised.

Both the Federal Prison Service (FSIN) and the Orenburg Regional Prison Service told Forum 18 that no torture took place, the latter stating that "One of the convicts was injured through his own negligence".

Orenburg Deputy Regional Prosecutor Andrey Vyazikov told Forum 18 on 26 February that "on the basis of information received about the injuries of one of the inmates, a prosecutorial review has been organised", after which prosecutors would determine whether "unlawful methods of physical pressure" had been used against prisoners.

No-one is known to have been arrested and put on criminal trial for torturing the five men.

Roman Makhnyov (born 4 February 1976) stated that FSB security service officials handcuffed him to a heating pipe overnight and denied him food for two days while they interrogated him after his arrest in Kaluga on 26 June 2019. No-one is known to have been arrested and put on criminal trial for torturing Makhnyov.

Makhnyov subsequently spent 182 days in detention and 57 days under house arrest before being released under specific restrictions. He has been charged under Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 1 but his case is still at the preliminary investigation stage. Forum 18 received no answers to its questions about Makhnyov's torture from Kaluga Region FSB.

Kaluga Regional Prosecutor's Office reviewed the incident, Kaluga Regional Human Rights Ombudsperson Yury Zelnikov told Forum 18 on 12 March 2020, and concluded that there was no evidence that FSB officers had used "illicit methods" against Makhnyov.

National Guard troops/riot police tortured seven Jehovah's Witnesses in the Investigative Committee's building in Surgut (Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Region) after arresting them

on 15 February 2019. This was "directed and facilitated" by the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Region Investigative Committee, according to Jehovah's Witness lawyer Yegiazar Chernikov.

The seven Jehovah's Witnesses, Sergey Pavlovich Loginov (born 18 September 1961), Vyacheslav Pavlovich Boronos (born 1 June 1966), Sergey Vladimirovich Volosnikov (born 7 November 1977), Artyom Stanislavovich Kim (born 1 August 1988), Aleksey Nikolayevich Plekhov (28 July 1977), Yevgeny Nikolayevich Kayrak (born 29 March 1986), and Kirill Severinchik were released after questioning, and went immediately to have their injuries documented by doctors.

Two Investigative Committee officials implicated in the torture were given awards, and one of the victims was re-arrested after reporting the torture. The Jehovah's Witnesses' lawyer told Forum 18 that the medical report on the torture of the seven men identified "multiple injuries .. in the form of bruises, haematomas, abrasions, and burns from an electric shock prod, which by their stage coincided with the date of interrogation".

Neither the Regional nor the Federal Investigative Committee has responded to Forum 18's questions about the tortures. The Federal Investigative Committee took over investigation of the Jehovah's Witnesses' claims in summer 2019 after its regional subordinates twice concluded that their colleagues had committed no offence.

The Investigative Committee has refused five times to open a criminal case, most recently last winter, Jehovah's Witness lawyer Yegiazar Chernikov told Forum 18 on 16 December 2020. He added that there was in fact no investigation, despite victims being able to identify several riot police/National Guard officers. The Investigative Committee did not announce its decisions not to prosecute the perpetrators; Jehovah's Witness lawyers had to find out "with difficulty", by going to court. "The authorities place the highest value not on rights and freedoms (Article 2 of the Constitution), but on their own reputation and creating the illusion that they carried out an investigation."

No-one is known to have been arrested and put on criminal trial for torturing the seven men.

On 25 February 2019, the seven torture victims and two other Jehovah's Witnesses lodged an appeal (Application No. 10618/19) at the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) in Strasbourg under several Articles of the European Convention on Human Rights, including Article 3 ("Prohibition of torture") and Article 9 ("Freedom of thought, conscience, and religion"). The appeal has not yet been communicated to the Russian government, the ECtHR press office told Forum 18 on 14 December 2020.

All the torture victims except Kirill Severinchik have been charged or named as suspects under Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 1 or Part 2 (some also under Article 282.3, Part 1).

On 14 and 15 December 2020, Forum 18 sent further written enquiries to all appropriate agencies in the Chita, Orenburg, Kaluga, and Surgut cases, as well as to the Human Rights Ombudsperson Tatyana Moskalkova in Moscow. Forum 18 noted Russia's obligations under the UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment which makes "these offences punishable by appropriate penalties which take into account their grave nature", and asked whether those involved had been arrested, investigated, or suspended from work, whether a criminal case had been opened against them, and when they will be put on trial, and if none of these measures had been taken, why not.

As of the end of the working day on 16 December, Forum 18 had received no response to any of these enquiries.

Special bimonthly FORB Digest (01-15.12.2020)

15.12.20 - Another trial of Jehovah's Witness nears conclusion

Link to full text in Russian: <https://www.kavkaz-uzel.media/articles/357596/>

The prosecution requested a three year suspended sentence and a year of restricted liberty for Ruslan Alyev, a Rostov Jehovah's Witness, who is accused of participating in an extremist organization. The defense asked for his acquittal.

[Continue reading...](#)

14.12.20 - Two young women suspected of offending religious sentiments in Russia's Murmansk Region

Murmansk, December 14, Interfax - A criminal case based on religious offense has been opened in the centuries-old village of Umba in Russia's Murmansk Region, the regional branch of the Russian Investigative Committee said.

[Continue reading...](#)

12.12.20 - U.S.A. challenges Russian stance in religious rights debate

Link to full text in Russian: <https://rossaprimavera.ru/news/960cb54a>

The Russian Orthodox Church (RPTs) is trying to split world Orthodoxy, the ambassador of the U.S.A. to Greece, Geoffrey R. Pyatt, declared on 9 December, the official website of the American embassy in Greece reports.

[Continue reading...](#)

12.12.20 - Orel Jehovah's Witnesses locked up for two months

Link to full text in Russian: https://newsorel.ru/fn_654153.html

A court authorized the detention for a period of two months of two adherents of the "Jehovah's Witnesses Orel" organization, which was earlier ruled to be extremist and forbidden in Russia, the press service of the investigation department of the Investigative Committee of Russia for Orel oblast reported.

[Continue reading...](#)

11.11.20 - Putin instructs FM to initiate discussions on measures to prevent insult of religious feelings at int'l forums

Moscow, December 11, Interfax - Russian President Vladimir Putin has given the Foreign Ministry until March 1, 2021 to initiate discussions on international forums concerning measures to prevent actions insulting religious feelings of believers and fomenting interfaith enmity and conflicts.

[Continue reading...](#)

11.12.20 - Russian president bids to change terms of religious rights debate

Link to full text in Russian: <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=76313>

Russian President Vladimir Putin instructed the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (M.I.D.) to initiate, before 1 March 2021, a discussion on the international level of questions concerning prevention of actions aimed at hurting believers' religious feelings and exacerbating inter-religious strife and conflicts on religious grounds.

[Continue reading...](#)

10.12.20 - Russian Jews record decline in number of offline anti-Semitic manifestations amid pandemic

Moscow, December 10, Interfax - While the number of anti-Semitic incidents in Russia has been declining in real life, it has significantly grown online, the Federation of Jewish Communities of Russia (FJCR) said.

[Continue reading...](#)

09.12.20 - Two Catholic priests to face trial in Vitebsk for administrative violation

Minsk, December 9, Interfax - Two Catholic priests were detained for an administrative violation in Vitebsk. They will be tried.

[Continue reading...](#)

09.12.20 - Apparent fallout from Moscow case of Jehovah's Witnesses

Link to full text in Russian: <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/4605303>

The directorate of the S.K.R. [Investigative Committee of Russia] for Orel oblast opened a criminal case against three adherents of the religious organization of Jehovah's Witnesses (considered extremist in the R.F.).

[Continue reading...](#)

07.12.20 - American House of Representatives condemns Russian rights violations

Link to full text in Russian: <https://credo.press/234483/>

The House of Representatives of the American Congress adopted on 4 December a resolution with the demand to release Russian political prisoners, including the Karelian researcher of stalinist repressions, Yury Dmitriev; the former Yukos employee Aleksei Pichugin; and Danish citizen Jehovah's Witness Dennis Christensen.

[Continue reading...](#)

03.12.20 - Judge rejects prosecutor's request to imprison Jehovah's Witnesses without trial

Link to full text in Russian: <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=76262>

The Lenin district court of Voronezh changed the measure of restriction of ten adherents of Jehovah's Witnesses (an organization forbidden in the R.F.), imposing on them a ban on certain activities, Interfax was told at the court.

[Continue reading...](#)

03.12.20 - Security forces raided the homes of believers in the Chelyabinsk Region, including the home of a 69-year-old woman. A criminal case was initiated

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2020/12/1.html>

On November 30, 2020, in the city of Snezhinsk, Chelyabinsk Region, searches were carried out in 4 families of believers, including a 69-year-old woman. A criminal case was initiated under Art. 282.2 (2) of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation against 43-year-old Ilya Olenin.

[Continue reading...](#)

02.12.20 - Russian police accused of brutality against Jehovah's Witness

Link to full text in Russian: <https://www.zaprava.ru/svidetel-iegovy-iz-moskvy-zayavil-ob-izbienii-silovikami/>

A Jehovah's Witness (the organization is considered extremist in the R.F.) from Moscow, 49-year-old Vardan Zakarian, immediately after release from an I.V.S. [temporary holding cell], filed a complaint about the actions of law enforcers during searches in his apartment and he accused them of a beating. This information appeared on the website of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia.

[Continue reading...](#)

Misuse of anti-extremism legislation

SOVA CENTER (15.12.2020) - <https://bit.ly/38eMnpI> - Sova Center in Moscow has just published its monthly report about the misuse of the anti-extremism legislation against some religious groups.

Falun Gong

In November, the Fifth General Jurisdiction Appellate Court upheld the claim of the prosecutor of the Republic of Khakassia to liquidate and recognize as extremist Khakassian Regional Public Organization for Spiritual and Physical Self-Improvement of a Person under the Great Falun Law "Falun Dafa."

Earlier, in July, the Supreme Court of the Republic of Khakassia dismissed the claim, but the Prosecutor's Office appealed this decision. The claim accused the Khakassian organization of trying to disseminate Zhuan Falun, – a treatise by Falun Dafa (Falun Gong) founder Li Hongzhi.

According to Falun Gong practitioners, the Khakassian Falun Dafa organization ceased its operations in 2017, and have tried to notify the state authorities about it. However, the prosecutor's office stated that they never received the minutes of the meeting, during which the organization had made its decision to self-dissolve. Meanwhile, in August, the court of first instance came to the conclusion that the plaintiff's demands to ban the organization's activities were disproportionate to the violations committed, since the fact of mass distribution of extremist materials had never been established.

There were only isolated cases of violation of the law by the organization's members, for which they were individually held accountable. Zhuan Falun was recognized as extremist on the grounds that it allegedly advocated the superiority of the adherents of Falun Gong ideology over other people. In our opinion, propaganda of the truth of one's own convictions cannot be regarded as incitement to hatred, and the book does not contain any calls for violence, therefore the ban against it is inappropriate.

Thus, there were no grounds for banning the organization in Khakassia. Falun Dafa is a new religious movement is built around the practice of qigong gymnastics in combination with elements of Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism. It has been banned and persecuted in China, and its followers abroad, in turn, sharply criticize the Chinese authorities.

Jehovah's Witnesses

The active persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses continued in November. They are being charged with involvement in the activities of banned organizations based on the April 2017 ruling of the Supreme Court of Russia that recognized the Administrative Center of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia and 395 of their local religious organizations as extremist. We believe that this decision had no legal basis and regard it as a manifestation of religious discrimination.

The Pervomaisky District Court of Omsk delivered a verdict in the case of Sergei Polyakov, Anastasia Polyakova, Dinara Dyusekeeva and Gaukhar Bektemirova. Polyakov was sentenced to three years in a maximum security colony under Article 282.2 Part 1 of the Criminal Code (organizing the activities of an extremist organization). The other defendants were sentenced under Article 282.2 Part 2 (participation in the activities of an extremist organization).

Polyakova received a suspended sentence of two and a half years, Dyusekeeva – a two year suspended sentence, and Bektemirova – a suspended sentence of two years and three months. In the Kamchatka Territory, the Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky City Court found Sergey Ledenev guilty under Article 282.2 Part 1 of the Criminal Code and issued a two year suspended sentence followed by a probationary period of three years.

Meanwhile, in Smolensk, the Leninsky District Court returned for further investigation the case of two Jehovah's Witnesses – 64-year-old Valentina Vladimirova and 61-year-old Tatyana Galkevich. The court's decision is related to the inadmissibility of evidence provided by the prosecutor's office. Vladimirova and Galkevich were charged under Article 282.2 Part 2 of the Criminal Code because of the prayer meetings held in their apartments. They spent six months, from May to November 2019, in a pre-trial detention center.

A new criminal case was opened in Komi against six believers: Nikolai Anufriev, Eduard Merinkov, Pavel Ogorodov, Viktor Schannikov, Alexander Vorontsov and Alexander Prilepsky. It was combined

with the case of Gennady Polyakevich and Gennady Skutelets, opened in January under Article 282.2 Parts 1 and 2 of the Criminal Code.

A criminal case under Article 282.2 Part 2 of the Criminal Code was opened against Elena Menchikova in Karachay-Cherkessia; she was put under travel restrictions.

In Kabardino-Balkaria, a criminal case against the followers of the Jehovah's Witnesses teachings was initiated under Article 282.2 Part 1.1 (recruitment into an extremist organization); the defendants are Vadim Zalipaev and Maria Zalipaeva, relatives of previously persecuted Yuri Zalipaev.

Five criminal cases were initiated against believers in the Lipetsk Region. Sergei Kretoev and Yevgeny Reshetnikov were arrested as defendants under Article 282.2 Part 1 of the Criminal Code; Natalya Perekatyi, Svetlana Vyrezkova and Tatyana Morlang, charged under Article 282.2 Part 2 of the Criminal Code, were released from a temporary detention facility after 48 hours.

In Nizhnekamsk (Tatarstan), a criminal case was initiated under Article 282.2 Part 2 of the Criminal Code. The believers' homes were searched; 12 people were interrogated.

In Cheboksary, a criminal case under Article 282.2 Part 1 was opened against Vladimir Dutkin. Finally, for the first time, a criminal case against Jehovah's Witnesses was opened in Moscow under Article 282.2 Parts 1, 1.1 and 2. Ivan Tchaikovsky, age 65, (who, back in the 1990s, headed the Moscow Jehovah's Witnesses community that was later liquidated by a court decision that was later declared illegal by the ECHR) was detained along with Vitaly Komarov, Yuri Chernyshev, Sergei Shatalov and Vardan Zakaryan (who was hit with a rifle butt in the course of detention and subsequently hospitalized). All five were placed under house arrest as a preventive measure. The Moscow Public Monitoring Commission reported that Vladimir Kalinushkin had also been detained in connection with the activities of Jehovah's Witnesses.

Muslims

In early November, the Southern District Military Court issued a guilty verdict to three residents of the Krasnogvardeisky District of Crimea charged with involvement in the activities of the banned radical Islamic party Hizb ut-Tahrir. Rustem Emiruseinov was sentenced under Article 205.5 Part 1 of the Criminal Code (organizing the activities of a terrorist organization) to 17 years of imprisonment in a maximum security penal colony with the first two years to be served in prison. The court's sentence to Arsen Abkhairov and Eskender Abduganiev charged under Article 205.5 Part 2 of the Criminal Code (participation in the activities of a terrorist organization) was 13 and 12 years in a maximum-security colony, respectively, also with the first two years to be served in prison. All three were accused of promoting Hizb ut-Tahrir among local residents.

In late November, the Central District Military Court in Yekaterinburg found Alexei Botva, a resident of the Samara Region, guilty of involvement in the activities of Hizb ut-Tahrir, specifically of participating in the meetings of the organization's local cell, and sentenced him to five years of imprisonment under Article 205.5 Part 2 of the Criminal Code.

The FSB detained five alleged Hizb ut-Tahrir followers in Kazan in early November. A criminal case was initiated against the detainees, probably under Article 205.5 of the Criminal Code.

We would like to remind that we consider prosecution against the party Hizb ut-Tahrir followers under the "terrorist articles" merely on the basis of their party activity (holding meetings, reading literature, etc.) inappropriate. The organization itself was banned in Russia as terrorist despite the fact that it was never implicated in using terrorism.

The Karachay-Cherkessia Prosecutor's Office reported in early November that, in the Malokarachaevsky District, six local residents were fined 1,000 rubles each under Article 20.29 of the Administrative Code (storage of extremist materials for the purpose of mass distribution). As indicated on the website of the Malokarachaevsky District Court, all six offenders – Jasalli Albotov, Alibek Baboev, Rashid Dzhankezov, Osman Urusov, Abdullah Tokhchukov and Umar Tokhchukov – kept *The Future Belongs to Islam*, a banned book of Sayyid Qutb, "in a generally accessible place in their home" and each of them took this book along when going out to offer it as reading material to all their acquaintances wishing for a more in-depth study of the Islamic religion. We view the ban against *The Future Belongs to Islam* as unfounded, since the book contains no inflammatory appeals, while its statements characterizing Islam as the true religion and critical of other religions

are typical of most faiths and, in and of themselves, cannot serve as a basis for recognizing a book as extremist.

Therefore, in our opinion, the prosecution in this case was inappropriate.

Special bimonthly FORB Digest (15-30.11.2020)

30.11.20 - Another Jehovah's Witness put under house arrest instead of detention

Moscow, November 30, Interfax - The Presnensky District Court of Moscow on Monday did not take into custody the fifth detained follower of the movement *Jehovah's Witnesses* (banned in Russia).

[Continue reading...](#)

27.11.20 - Fifth Jehovah's witness still in police custody

Link to full text in Russian: <https://www.m24.ru/news/sudy/27112020/143263>

In Moscow, a court placed under house arrest three leaders of the Jehovah's Witnesses organization, which is considered extremist in Russia. Yet another defendant in the case had his term of detention extended.

[Continue reading...](#)

27.11.20 - Russian court releases Jehovah's Witnesses in Moscow

Link to full text in Russian: <https://www.jw-russia.org/cases/moscow.html#20201127>

The Presnya district court of Moscow ordered the release from custody of another three believers: Vitaly Komarov, Ivan Chaikovsky, and Yuri Chernyshev. A measure of restriction was chosen for all of them in the form of house arrest.

[Continue reading...](#)

27.11.20 - After Yuriy Zalipayev acquittal, law enforcers raided peaceful believers across towns of Kabardino-Balkaria

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2020/11/10.html>

On November 12, 2020, armed officers of the FSB and the Investigative Committee roughly invaded at least six families of believers in the towns of Maiskiy and Tyrnyauz (Kabardino-Balkaria). Among the victims was the family of a believer, Yuriy Zalipaev, who was acquitted by the court only a month ago.

[Continue reading...](#)

26.11.20 - Jehovah's Witnesses avoid threatened pretrial imprisonment

Link to full text in Russian: <https://www.m24.ru/news/sudy/27112020/143263>

In Moscow, a court placed under house arrest three leaders of the Jehovah's Witnesses organization, which is considered extremist in Russia. Yet another defendant in the case had his term of detention extended.

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26.11.20 - Jehovah's Witnesses face pretrial detention in Moscow

Link to full text in Russian: <https://rg.ru/2020/11/26/reg-cfo/sk-prosit-arestovat-chetveryh-rukovoditelej-centra-svidetelej-iegovy.html>

Today the Presnya court of Moscow will consider the request of the Investigative Committee [S.K.R.] to detain in custody four supporters of the Administrative Center of Jehovah's Witnesses, which is banned in the R.F.

[Continue reading...](#)

25.11.20 - Jehovah's Witnesses being searched in Moscow. How will these affect European foreign ministers?

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2020/11/8.html>

On November 24, 2020, at least ten searches of believers took place in Moscow. Among the 4 detainees, 65-year-old Ivan Tchaikovsky, who is the applicant in the [case Jehovah's Witnesses in Moscow v. Russia](#).

[Continue reading...](#)

25.11.20 - Jehovah's Witnesses assess impact of latest raids

Link to full text in Russian: <https://www.jw-russia.org/news/2020/11/8.html>

On 24 November, in Moscow, at least ten searches were conducted in believers' homes. Among the four persons arrested is 65-year-old Ivan Chaikovsky, who was the plaintiff in the case of "Jehovah's Witnesses in Moscow v. Russia.

[Continue reading...](#)

24.11.20 - Major law enforcement move against Jehovah's Witnesses based on Moscow

Link to full text in Russian: <https://moscow.sledcom.ru/news/item/1517424/>

The first department for investigation of especially important cases of crimes against persons and public safety of the Chief Investigation Department of the Investigative Committee of Russia [S.K.R.; analogous to American F.B.I.—tr.] for the city of Moscow opened a criminal case on the basis of evidence of crimes identified in parts 1, 1.1, and 2

of article 282.1 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation (arranging the activity of an extremist organization).

[Continue reading...](#)

23.11.20 - Protestants find amicable arrangement for their church building

Link to full text in Russian: <https://tolknews.ru/obsestvo/46315>

The church of Evangelical Christians-Baptists of Biisk on 19 November filed in the arbitration court of Altai Territory a lawsuit against the mayor's office of the science city for two million rubles. The parties state that there is no conflict between them, but the suit is the only way to register the previously constructed church's building as its property.

[Continue reading...](#)

23.11.20 - Moscow patriarchate publishes Black List of disputed clerics

Link to full text in Russian: <https://credo.press/234209/>

The Moscow patriarchate has started composing a public list of "false priests, including schismatics," who are conducting "illegal activity." A corresponding department has appeared 19 November on the website of the Department for Relations of Church and Society and News Media of the Moscow patriarchate.

[Continue reading...](#)

20.11.20 - Human rights organization publicizes repression of Jehovah's Witnesses

Link to full text in Russian: <https://www.zaprava.ru/obyski-u-svidetelej-iegovy-v-nizhnekamske-respublika-tatarstan-podrobnosti/>

On 18 November, law enforcement personnel arrived to search at homes of Jehovah's Witnesses (an organization ruled to be extremist in R.F.) living in the city of Nizhnekamsk in the republic of Tatarstan. On the website of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia, details of what happened appeared.

[Continue reading...](#)

19.11.20 - At long last, trials of four Jehovah's Witnesses begin in Russian south

Link to full text in Russian: <https://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/356672/>

Today a court in Rostov-on-Don extended simultaneously by six months the detention of Alexander Parkov, Vilen Avanesov, and Arsen Avanesov, who have already spent a year and a half in custody in a case concerning extremism.

[Continue reading...](#)

18.11.20 - Russian Buddhists renew request for Dalai Lama's visit

Link to full text in Russian: <https://govoritmoskva.ru/news/253631/>

The last time the spiritual leader was in Russia was 2004. After that, the foreign affairs ministry refused him a visit, citing the friendly relations with China and the shared common position on Tibet.

[Continue reading...](#)

17.11.20 - Changes in religion law move forward

Link to full text in Russian: <https://credo.press/234133/>

The draft law on changes in the Russian law "On freedom of conscience and religious associations" is scheduled for adoption on first reading in December and amendments for the second reading should "remove the concern of religious organizations because of the provision of the requirement of retraining clergy in Russia.

[Continue reading...](#)

16.11.20 - Russian authorities conduct another typical intervention with Jehovah's Witnesses

Link to full text in Russian: <https://lipetsk.sledcom.ru/news/item/1515478/>

An investigator of the first department for investigation of especially important cases of the investigation department of the Investigative Committee of Russia [S.K.R.] for Lipetsk oblast opened five criminal cases against local residents, ranging in age from 42 to 67, on the basis of materials provided by the directorate of the Ministry of Internal Affairs [M.V.D.] and the directorate of the F.S.B. of Russia for Lipetsk oblast.

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"Extremist organisation" trial outcomes: fines and suspended sentences

Of 21 Jehovah's Witnesses convicted of "extremism" charges since late July 2020, six were given jail terms and 13 suspended sentences. Receiving a suspended sentence means a convicted person must live under restrictions specified by the judge, regularly register with probation authorities, and avoid conviction for any other offence during the probationary period or risk being sent to prison. "A suspended sentence means that you need to live under stress for many years," Jehovah's Witnesses note.

By Victoria Arnold

Forum18 (25.11.2020) - <https://bit.ly/3lbc66S> - A total of 21 Jehovah's Witnesses have been convicted of "extremism" charges since late July 2020. They include the oldest

Jehovah's Witness yet to be found guilty of alleged extremism offences (at the age of 73). Among the punishments imposed are both the largest fine and the longest suspended sentences since prosecutions began following the 2017 liquidation of the Jehovah's Witness Administrative Centre.

Six of the 21 have received jail terms. The four defendants in one case in Bryansk Region will not be imprisoned as they had already served the time in pre-trial detention. Two men in another case in Kemerovo Region, however, will spend more than a year in jail if their appeal is unsuccessful.

Thirteen of the 21 have received suspended sentences, most recently Sergey Ledenyov in Kamchatka on 24 November. The two others were given large fines (see below).

Although not enough cases have ended to draw any definitive conclusions, it appears that, in 2020, courts have been moving towards suspended sentences for Jehovah's Witnesses, although prosecutors continue to request real prison terms in most cases. It remains unclear why this might be.

Receiving a suspended sentence means that a convicted person is not imprisoned, but must live under a set of restrictions specified by the judge, regularly register with probation authorities, and avoid conviction for any other offence during the probationary period or risk being sent to prison (see below).

The 21 individuals convicted since July are among more than 400 Jehovah's Witnesses and Muslim readers of theologian Said Nursi's works who have been convicted, are on trial, or remain under investigation across Russia, mostly on accusations of "organising" or "participating in the activities of a banned extremist organisation".

Muslims who meet to study the writings of Said Nursi may be prosecuted for "organising" or "participating in" the activities of "Nurdzhular", which was banned as extremist in 2008 but which Muslims in Russia deny ever existed. There are no Nursi-related trials currently underway, however, and there have been no convictions in the last two years. Three people are under criminal investigation in the Tatarstan and Dagestan Republics (see forthcoming article).

At the request of Russia, Interpol issued two Red Notices against Muslims who are now abroad: Timur Atadzhanov in 2018 and Ashurali Magomedeminov in 2020. Both studied their faith using the works of the late Turkish Muslim theologian Said Nursi. If sent back to Russia for criminal prosecution, they would be likely to face imprisonment, a fine, or a suspended sentence if convicted.

The four months between late July and late November have also seen the first acquittal of a Jehovah's Witness on extremism charges in three years – in a case unconnected to the nationwide ban on Jehovah's Witness activities – while two more trials have ended in jail sentences.

Eight Jehovah's Witnesses and one Muslim reader of Nursi's works are already serving terms in general-regime labour camps (ispravitelniye kolonii, "correctional colonies"). After the end of his sentence, another Muslim who studied Nursi's writings was stripped of his Russian citizenship, and remains in a detention centre for foreigners and stateless persons.

Punishments

After being kept under FSB security service or police surveillance for some months, most targeted Jehovah's Witnesses (like Muslim readers of Nursi's works) are prosecuted for

"organising" (Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 1), or "participating in" (Part 2), "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".

The activities prosecuted under both these parts of Criminal Code Article 282.2 are very similar, including meeting in each other's homes to pray and sing together, study sacred texts, and to discuss shared beliefs.

Possible punishments under Criminal Code Article 282.2 are:

Part 1 – six to ten years' imprisonment; or a 400,000 to 800,000 Rouble fine;
Part 2 – two to six years' imprisonment; a 300,000 to 600,000 Rouble fine; or one to four years' assigned labour.

Several Jehovah's Witnesses have also been charged under Criminal Code Article 282.3, Part 1 ("Financing extremist activity"), apparently by continuing to collect donations for activities from fellow believers after the 2017 ban on Jehovah's Witness activity.

Possible punishments under Criminal Code Article 282.3, Part 1 are four to eight years' imprisonment; a 300,000 to 700,000 Rouble fine; or two to five years' assigned labour.

Other charges have been brought against Jehovah's Witnesses and Muslims under Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 1.1 ("Inclination, recruitment or other involvement of a person in an extremist organisation").

Possible punishments are four to eight years' imprisonment; a 300,000 to 700,000 Rouble fine; or two to five years' assigned labour.

Judges can also impose a range of restrictions on freedom both during suspended sentences, and for certain periods after a person's release from imprisonment.

Despite the similarities in the activities being prosecuted, trials have so far ended in a variety of sentences – from prison terms of several years, to suspended sentences of varying lengths, to a range of fines. There has also been one sentence of assigned labour, later changed to a fine.

No one has been acquitted, though judges have returned some cases to prosecutors, who later resubmit them. Defendants have sometimes succeeded in getting sentences reduced or having cases sent for retrial on appeal, though no conviction has yet been overturned.

Investigators and prosecutors may also have people added to the Federal Financial Monitoring Service (Rosfinmonitoring) "List of Terrorists and Extremists", whose accounts banks are obliged to freeze, although small transactions (up to 10,000 Roubles) are permitted. Individuals can be added to the list when they are still under investigation or on trial, or after they have been sentenced. Being added to the list leads to a variety of problems in everyday life, e.g. being unable to receive salaries, pensions, or benefits, renew insurance policies, or even purchase a phone sim card.

"Even lenient punishment is punishment"

Jehovah's Witness lawyers note that it is difficult to say whether it is better to receive a fine or a suspended sentence: "A fine means that you have to suffer materially right now. A suspended sentence means that you need to live under stress for many years, and the sentence can be changed to a real one [i.e. the convicted person could be sent to

prison]. Even lenient punishment is punishment, the consequences of which will be felt for years."

Suspended sentences

It is now common for Jehovah's Witnesses on trial under Criminal Code Article 282.2, Parts 1 and 2 (as well as Article 282.3, Part 1) to receive suspended sentences, with 13 of the 21 recently convicted individuals receiving this form of punishment.

While this means that they do not go to prison, it may "cripple their employment and financial options", as a Jehovah's Witness press statement put it on 9 October, through associated restrictions. It also puts those convicted at risk of imprisonment should they be found guilty of another offence (including any unconnected to Jehovah's Witness activity).

When imposing a suspended sentence, a judge usually sets out three periods of time:

- the sentence itself, which is the time the defendant would serve if sent to prison;
- the probationary period (ispytatelnyy srok), which is the time during which any other conviction would send the defendant to prison (it is counted from the day the verdict comes into force and may be longer or shorter than the sentence itself, or the same length);
- and a period of restrictions on freedom (ogranicheniya svobody), which runs concurrently with the probationary period but is not necessarily of the same duration.

According to Criminal Code Article 73, restrictions may include a curfew, an obligation to inform probation authorities of any change in one's place of residence or work, a ban on visiting particular locations or travelling abroad, deprivation of the right to vote, and a bar on standing for election. If any of these terms is breached, the probation period may be extended. If the person is convicted of another crime, he/she will likely be imprisoned.

Time spent in a pre-trial detention centre is not taken into account when calculating the probationary period (but would be if the defendant were later sent to prison).

If those convicted serve out the probationary period without incident, the conviction is spent (sudimost gasitsya) and they no longer have an active criminal record.

The Penal Enforcement Inspectorate (Ugolovno-ispolnitelnaya inspektsiya), a subdivision of the Federal Penitentiary Service (FSIN) is responsible (in cooperation with local Interior Ministry branches) for monitoring people serving suspended sentences, as well as those performing assigned labour and community service, and those under house arrest. The Inspectorate registers them, checks their compliance with the terms of their sentence, records any change of address, and may visit them at home with local police.

"A suspended sentence is a 'sword of Damocles' for the convicted person," lawyer Konstantin Markin said in comments for the OVD-Info police monitoring organisation on 13 December 2018. "They seem to be free, but for any offence, even the slightest, they can be imprisoned."

Kostroma: Longest known suspended sentences

The second trial of Valeriya Aleksandrovna Rayman (born 21 May 1993) and Sergey Alekseyevich Rayman (born 5 October 1996) at Kostroma's Sverdlovsk District Court ended on 9 October 2020 in the longest suspended sentences yet imposed on Jehovah's Witnesses – seven and eight years respectively. Prosecutors had requested seven-year suspended sentences for both. The Raymans and their lawyers have challenged their

convictions and the first appeal hearing is due to take place at Kostroma Regional Court on 3 December 2020.

Judge Dmitry Balayev found the Raymans guilty under both Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 1 and Part 2 ("Organisation" and "Participation in the activities of a banned extremist organisation").

The Raymans first appeared at Sverdlovsk District Court in August 2019, but Judge Yekaterina Molodova sent their case back to prosecutors on 25 September 2019, citing violations in the indictment and noting that "in this instance, there is a legal right to the profession of the Jehovah's Witness religion, which was not prohibited by the Supreme Court's decision of 20 April 2017".

Both Valeriya and Sergey are currently under travel restrictions while their appeal is pending, their lawyer Yevgeniya Shemberger told Forum 18 on 3 November 2020. If their sentences enter legal force, they will be subject to a five-year probationary period and two years of restrictions on freedom, including a ban on leaving Kostroma and on moving house without the agreement of probation authorities.

The prosecution has requested a minor change to the wording of the verdict (from describing the defendants' actions as a "particularly serious offence" to describing them as "two serious offences"), but has not challenged the sentence.

"We're glad that the term is suspended and that we can remain free, but we consider the sentence unjust," Sergey Rayman commented to Forum 18 on 9 November. "They convicted us for being believing people. For the fact that we read the Bible and lived by its norms. We have always been law-abiding and have led decent and honest lives."

Rayman added that "of course" being under travel restrictions causes difficulties. "We cannot visit my parents, or my grandmother, who cannot come to us because of her state of health, and who lives in another town. Also, my previous much-loved job involved constant travel to other cities, which became impossible after the criminal case was opened against me and my wife."

Forum 18 emailed Kostroma Regional Prosecutor's Office before the start of the working day of 10 November, asking why meeting for prayer and Bible study is considered a criminal offence and who was harmed by the Raymans' actions. Forum 18 received no reply by the middle of the working day in Kostroma on 25 November.

Other suspended sentences: Ulyanovsk, Kamchatka, Kemerovo

Eleven other Jehovah's Witnesses have received suspended sentences since late July. On 24 November 2020, Petropavlovsky-Kamchatsky City Court (Kamchatka Region) handed Sergey Mikhailovich Ledenyov (born 23 July 1974) a two-year suspended sentence under Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 2.

As in several other recent cases, Judge Natalya Lykova reclassified Ledenyov's charge from Part 1 ("Organisation of the activities of an extremist organisation") to Part 2 ("Participation in the activities of an extremist organisation"). Prosecutors had asked for a six-year prison term.

Ledenyov denies any involvement in extremism and intends to challenge his conviction. "My conscience is clear before God and people," he said in his final speech to the court on 11 November. "What exactly is my crime? The entire judicial investigation proved that the worship meetings of which I am accused are exclusively peaceful, legal, benign religious activities that have not been prohibited by any court."

Should the verdict enter legal force, Ledenyov will serve a three-year probationary period. It is as yet unknown what restrictions on freedom would be imposed.

Also in Kamchatka, Konstantin Aleksandrovich Bazhenov (born 24 July 1977), Snezhana Yevgenyevna Bazhenova (20 December 1977), and Vera Ivanovna Zolotova (born 20 October 1946) were all found guilty under Article 282.2, Part 2 on 25 September 2020, after Yelizovo District Court reclassified their case from Part 1. Each received a two-year suspended sentence with a three-year probationary period and six months of restrictions on freedom. They appealed unsuccessfully at Kamchatka Regional Court on 17 November 2020.

(Bazhenov in Kamchatka should not be confused with fellow Jehovah's Witness Konstantin Viktorovich Bazhenov from Saratov, given a three and a half year jail term in September 2019.)

Zolotova, who has now turned 74, is the oldest Jehovah' Witness to be convicted so far. Several other people in their 70s and 80s, some of them in poor health, are also on trial. Prosecutors had requested that Zolotova (who spent her working life as a lathe turner and book-keeper) should be fined 400,000 Roubles, a huge sum for a pensioner in Kamchatka, where the average monthly state pension in 2020 is just over 22,000 Roubles.

Prosecutors requested a total joint fine of 1,200,000 Roubles for the Bazhenovs (who were both teachers). The Bazhenovs and Zolotova have all been on the Rosfinmonitoring List since 11 October 2018.

On 10 September 2020, Khasan Abduvaitovich Kogut (born 7 May 1983) was convicted under Article 282.2, Part 2 at Beryozovsky City Court (Kemerovo Region). The Judge handed him a suspended sentence of two years and six months with a two-year probationary period. Prosecutors had asked for a two-year prison term. Kogut's appeal date is as yet unknown. He has been on the Rosfinmonitoring List since 28 February 2019.

Kogut had originally been investigated alongside Sergey Britvin and Vadim Levchuk, whose homes were raided on the same night in July 2018, but was made the subject of a separate prosecution in January 2019. Britvin and Levchuk were each sentenced to four years' imprisonment on 2 September 2020.

At Zasviyazhsky District Court in Ulyanovsk on 8 October 2020, Sergey Aleksandrovich Mysin (born 21 June 1965) received a four-year suspended sentence plus ten months of restrictions on freedoms under Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 1. Fellow defendants Aleksandr Vyacheslavovich Ganin (born 8 January 1957), Khoren Nikolevich Khachikyan (born 25 April 1985), and Andrey Vladimirovich Tabakov (born 23 January 1973) (all tried under Part 2) received three-year suspended sentences with eight months of restrictions on freedoms, and Natalya Aleksandrovna Mysina (17 December 1971) and Mikhail Grigoryevich Zelensky (born 7 November 1960) (also Part 2), received two-and-half year suspended sentences plus seven months of restrictions on freedom. Prosecutors had asked for jail terms for all six defendants of between three and seven years.

Their probationary periods range from two years and six months to four years, lawyer Yegiazar Chernikov told Forum 18 on 3 November, and they are under travel restrictions and a curfew. Both defence and prosecution have lodged appeals, requesting acquittal and a re-trial respectively. It is unknown when the appeal hearing (at Ulyanovsk Regional Court) might take place.

Sergey Mysin, who had health problems before his prosecution, was hospitalised in October 2019, but was discharged early when FSB security service officers allegedly put pressure on medical staff to stop his treatment, Jehovah's Witnesses said. He is still unwell, but has improved after an operation, Chernikov told Forum 18 on 3 November 2020.

The six Ulyanovsk defendants are among several Jehovah's Witnesses whose assets have been seized during their prosecutions as surety against the possible non-payment of fines after conviction. Zasviyazhsky District Court has ordered the return of the property, which included cars and large sums of money. All six, however, remain on the Rosfinmonitoring List (Ganin since 30 May 2019, the others since 6 May 2019).

Fines

Two Jehovah's Witnesses have also received large fines between late July and late November. On 28 July 2020, Furmanovo City Court (Ivanovo Region) fined Yevgeny Andreyevich Spirin (born 24 February 1986) 700,000 Roubles under Article 282.2, Part 1. This is the largest individual fine yet imposed on a Jehovah's Witness for "organisation of the activities of an extremist organisation", but it was reduced to 500,000 Roubles because of the 160 days Spirin had spent in detention.

Spirin appealed unsuccessfully on 14 October 2020. The prosecution also sought to have his punishment changed to its original request of seven years' imprisonment, but Ivanovo Regional Court refused to overturn the sentence.

Anatoly Mikhailovich Tokarev (born 31 December 1958), who was tried under both Article 282.2, Part 1 and Article 282.3, Part 1, received a fine of 500,000 Roubles on 23 October 2020 at October District Court in Kirov. The latter charge, of "Financing extremist activity", was based on Tokarev's attempt to cover the utility costs of an empty Kingdom Hall. Because he had not spent any time in detention, his fine was not reduced. It is unknown when his appeal against his conviction will reach Kirov Regional Court.

Although Spirin, Tokarev, and other Jehovah's Witnesses who have received fines have not been imprisoned and are not subject to the restrictions and obligations on those who have suspended sentences, their convictions may still impose a heavy burden. The average monthly wage in 2020 stood at 29,015 Roubles in Ivanovo Region, and at 31,729 Roubles in Kirov Region.

Spirin and Tokarev are also on the Rosfinmonitoring "List of Terrorists and Extremists", to which Tokarev was added on 4 July 2019 and Spirin on 24 November 2020.

First Jehovah's Witness acquittal in three years

On 7 October 2020, Yury Viktorovich Zalipayev (born 8 October 1962) became the first Jehovah's Witness to be acquitted of an extremism-related offence since the summer of 2017. After a trial lasting more than two years, Judge Yelena Kudryavtseva of Maysky District Court (Republic of Kabardino-Balkariya) found him not guilty under Criminal Code Article 280, Part 1 ("Public calls for extremist activity"). Prosecutors had requested a sentence of two years' imprisonment.

Prosecutors had also charged Zalipayev under Article 282, Part 1 ("Actions directed at the incitement of hatred [nenavist] or enmity [vrazhda], as well as the humiliation of an individual or group of persons on the basis of sex, race, nationality, language, origin, attitude to religion, or social group"), but this was dropped in January 2019.

Prosecutors alleged that Zalipayev "knowingly...decided on 16 August 2016 to carry out public actions aimed at inciting hatred and enmity towards a social group, 'Christian clergy', wherefore he decided to distribute a printed publication from the Federal List of Extremist Materials". Jehovah's Witnesses themselves claim that these publications were planted, and that Zalipayev's alleged exhortations to "beat Orthodox Christians and Muslims" are untrue.

The Supreme Court of the Republic of Kabardino-Balkariya received an appeal from prosecutors against Zalipayev's acquittal on 10 November, according to its website. This is due to be heard on 27 November.

Officers of the FSB security service – and possibly other agencies – have also searched Zalipayev's home and those of other Jehovah's Witnesses in Maysky several times since May 2020, most recently on 12 November, and investigators have opened another criminal case under Criminal Code Article 282.2. So far, Zalipayev and the others who have been subjected to searches are being treated as witnesses. "Investigators, the FSB, and the police have not calmed down and don't even plan on doing so," lawyer Anton Omelchenko commented to Forum 18 on 12 November.

The last Jehovah's Witnesses to be acquitted were Vyacheslav Yuryevich Stepanov (born 20 March 1977) and Andrey Petrovich Sivak (born 28 March 1974). In June 2017, Sergiyev Posad City Court (Moscow Region) found them not guilty under Criminal Code Article 282, Part 2 ("Actions directed at the incitement of hatred [nenavist] or enmity [vrazhda], as well as the humiliation of an individual or group of persons on the basis of sex, race, nationality, language, origin, attitude to religion, or social group"), when committed a) with violence or the threat of violence; b) by a person using their official position; c) by an organised group (of which Stepanov and Sivak were accused).

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List of those convicted on "extremism"-related charges for exercising freedom of religion or belief, by category of punishment (regional headings refer to where people were tried).

SUSPENDED SENTENCES (both in force and with appeals pending)

- Kamchatka Region

Petropavlovsky-Kamchatsky City Court

24 November 2020

1) Sergey Mikhailovich Ledenyov (born 23 July 1974) – 2 years, suspended; 3 years probation

Criminal Code Article: 282.2, Part 2 (changed by judge from Part 1)

Restrictions on freedoms unknown

Appeal: unknown

Yelizovo District Court

25 September 2020

2) Konstantin Aleksandrovich Bazhenov (born 24 July 1977) – 2 years, suspended; 3 years' probation; 6 months' restrictions on freedom

3) Snezhana Yevgenyevna Bazhenova (20 December 1977) – 2 years, suspended; 3 years' probation; 6 months' restrictions on freedom

4) Vera Ivanovna Zolotova (born 20 October 1946) – 2 years, suspended; 3 years' probation; 6 months' restrictions on freedom

Criminal Code Article: 282.2, Part 2 (changed from Part 1 by judge)

Appeal: unsuccessful – 17 November 2020, Kamchatka Regional Court

- Kemerovo Region

Beryozovsky City Court

10 September 2020

5) Khasan Abduvaitovich Kogut (born 7 May 1983) – 2 years and 6 months, suspended;
2 years' probation

Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 2

Restrictions on freedom unknown

Appeal: pending, Kemerovo Regional Court – hearing date unknown

- Khabarovsk Region

Railway District Court, Khabarovsk

18 February 2020

6) Yevgeny Anatolyevich Aksyonov (born 19 June 1967) – 2 years, suspended; 6 months'
restrictions on freedom

Criminal Code Article: 282.2, Part 2

Probationary period unknown

Appeal: unsuccessful – 26 May 2020, Khabarovsk Regional Court

4 February 2020

7) Stanislav Viktorovich Kim (born 5 July 1968) – 2 years, suspended; 2 years' probation

8) Nikolay Yuryevich Polevodov (born 10 February 1970) – 2 years, suspended; 2 years'
probation

Criminal Code Article: 282.2, Part 2

Restrictions on freedom unknown

Appeal: unsuccessful – 2 July 2020, Khabarovsk Regional Court

- Kostroma Region

Sverdlovsk District Court

9 October 2020

9) Sergey Alekseyevich Rayman (born 5 October 1996) – 8 years, suspended; 5 years'
probation; 2 years' restrictions on freedom

10) Valeriya Aleksandrovna Rayman (born 21 May 1993) – 7 years, suspended; 5 years'
probation; 2 years' restrictions on freedom

Criminal Code Articles: 282.2, Part 1, 282.2, Part 2

Appeal: due to be heard on 3 December 2020, Kostroma Regional Court

- Primorye Region

Nadezhdinsky District Court

21 January 2020

11) Grigory Gennadyevich Bubnov (born 4 September 1965) – 6 years, suspended; 5
years' probation; 5-year ban on involvement in public organisations + 1-year ban on
going to public events

Criminal Code Article: 282.2, Part 1

Appeal: unsuccessful – 18 March 2020, Primorye Regional Court

- Sakha Republic (Yakutiya)

Lensk District Court

1 April 2020

12) Igor Nikolayevich Ivashin (born 16 April 1976) – 6 years, suspended; 3 years and 6 months' probation; 1 year's restrictions on freedom; 5-year ban on holding leadership positions in any public organisation
Criminal Code Article: Article 282.2, Part 1
Appeal: unsuccessful – 21 May 2020, Supreme Court of the Sakha Republic

- Penza Region

Lenin District Court, Penza / Penza Regional Court

13 December 2019 / 16 September 2020

13) Vladimir Aleksandrovich Alushkin (30 June 1964) – 4 years, suspended

Criminal Code Article: 282.2, Part 1

Probationary period and restrictions on freedom unknown

14) Tatyana Sergeevna Alushkina (born 12 September 1963) – 2 years, suspended

15) Vladimir Aleksandrovich Kulyasov (born 17 April 1974) – 2 years, suspended

16) Andrey Aleksandrovich Magliv (20 June 1984) – 2 years, suspended

17) Galiya Anvarovna Olkhova (born 5 February 1970) – 2 years, suspended

18) Denis Vladimirovich Timoshin (born 23 March 1980) – 2 years, suspended

Criminal Code Article: 282.2, Part 2

Probationary periods and restrictions on freedom unknown

Originally convicted on 13 December 2019 – Vladimir Alushkin sentenced to six years' imprisonment, the rest given suspended sentences; verdict overturned on appeal at Penza Regional Court on 25 March 2020 and case sent for re-trial, but new proceedings halted by successful prosecution cassational appeal at 1st Cassational Court in Saratov; fresh appeal hearing at Penza Regional Court, at which original suspended sentences were upheld and Alushkin's prison term changed to a shorter suspended sentence.

- Pskov Region

Pskov Regional Court

3 August 2020

19) Gennady Valerianovich Shpakovsky (born 6 October 1958) – 6 years and 6 months, suspended; 2 years' probation

Criminal Code Articles: 282.2, Part 1; 282.3, Part 1

Restrictions on freedom unknown

Originally convicted on 9 June 2020 at Pskov City Court and sentenced to 6 years and 6 months' imprisonment – sentenced reduced on appeal.

- Ulyanovsk Region

Zasviyazhsky District Court, Ulyanovsk

8 October 2020

20) Sergey Aleksandrovich Mysin (born 21 June 1965) – 4 years, suspended; 10 months' restrictions on freedoms

Criminal Code Article: 282.2, Part 1

21) Aleksandr Vyacheslavovich Ganin (born 8 January 1957) – 3 years, suspended; 8 months' restrictions on freedom

22) Khoren Nikolevich Khachikyan (born 25 April 1985) – 3 years, suspended; 8 months' restrictions on freedom

23) Andrey Vladimirovich Tabakov (born 23 January 1973) – 3 years, suspended; 8 months' restrictions on freedom

Criminal Code Article: 282.2, Part 2

24) Natalya Aleksandrovna Mysina (born 17 December 1971) – 2 years and 6 months, suspended; 7 months' restrictions on freedom

25) Mikhail Grigoryevich Zelensky (born 7 November 1960) – 2 years and 6 months, suspended; 7 months' restrictions on freedom

Criminal Code Article: 282.2, Part 2

Probationary periods: from 2 years and 6 months to 4 years

Appeal: lodged at Ulyanovsk Regional Court by both defence and prosecution – hearing date unknown

FINES

- Ivanovo Region

Furmanovo City Court

1) Yevgeny Andreyevich Spirin (born 24 February 1986) – 700,000 Roubles (reduced to 500,000 to account for time spent in detention)

Criminal Code Article: 282.2, Part 1

Appeal: unsuccessful – 14 October 2020, Ivanovo Regional Court

- Kamchatka Region

Vilyuchinsk City Court

14 February 2020

2) Mikhail Yuryevich Popov (born 25 May 1962) – 350,000 Roubles

3) Yelena Vyacheslavovna Popova (born 10 September 1963) – 300,000 Roubles

Criminal Code Article: 282.2, Part 1 and 282.2, Part 1.1 – but changed to Part 2 by judge at sentencing

Appeal: partially successful – conviction upheld but fines reduced from 650,000 Roubles in total to 500,000 Roubles in total

- Kirov Region

October District Court, Kirov

23 October 2020

4) Anatoly Mikhailovich Tokarev (born 31 December 1958) – 500,000 Roubles

Criminal Code Articles: 282.2, Part 1 and 282.3, Part 1

Appeal: pending, Kirov Regional Court – hearing date unknown

- Murmansk Region

Polyarny District Court

24 January 2020

5) Roman Nikolayevich Markin (born 18 March 1974) – 300,000 Roubles (reduced from 600,000 Roubles to account for time spent in detention)

6) Viktor Fyodorovich Trofimov (born 26 March 1957) – 350,000 Roubles (reduced from 650,000 Roubles to account for time spent in detention)

Criminal Code Article: 282.2, Part 1

Appeal: unsuccessful – 25 May 2020, Murmansk Regional Court

- Oryol Region

Oryol District Court

1 April 2019

7) Sergey Vladimirovich Skrynnikov (born 30 October 1962) – 350,000 Roubles

Criminal Code Article: 282.2, Part 2

Appeal: unsuccessful – 13 June 2019, Oryol Regional Court

- Perm Region

Ordzhonikidze District Court, Perm

14 November 2019

8) Aleksey Aleksandrovich Metsger (born 8 September 1975) – 350,000 Roubles
Criminal Code Article: 282.2, Part 2
Appeal: unsuccessful – 13 January 2020, Perm Regional Court

4 July 2019

9) Aleksandr Vasilyevich Solovyov (born 13 February 1970) – 300,000 Roubles
Criminal Code Article: 282.2, Part 2
Appeal: unsuccessful – 5 September 2019, Perm Regional Court

ASSIGNED LABOUR (prinuditelniye raboty)

- Khabarovsk Region

Railway District Court, Khabarovsk
2 September 2019

1) Valery Vasilyevich Moskalenko (born 15 April 1967) – 2 years and 2 months' assigned labour + 6 months' restrictions on freedom
Criminal Code Article: 282.2, Part 2
Appeal: partially successful (conviction upheld but punishment reduced to 500,000 Rouble fine which was waived because of time spent in detention) – 5 November 2019, Khabarovsk Regional Court

"Extremist organisation" trial outcomes: jail sentences

Eight Jehovah's Witnesses and one Muslim Nursi reader are serving labour camp terms as "extremists". Six more Jehovah's Witnesses received jail terms since July. Sergey Britvin, one of two awaiting appeals, is allowed a "disabled cell" where he can lie down, his wife Natalya told Forum 18. It is so cold he must wear two jumpers and trousers. She takes him fresh colostomy bags and medications "all the time". A further 14 received suspended sentences.

By Victoria Arnold

Forum18 (23.11.2020) - <https://bit.ly/39iFcis> - More than 400 Jehovah's Witnesses and Muslim readers of theologian Said Nursi's works have been convicted, are on trial, or remain under investigation, mostly on accusations of "organising" or "participating in the activities of a banned extremist organisation". The vast majority are currently Jehovah's Witnesses, and there have been no recent trials or convictions of readers of Nursi's works.

Courts have found 20 Jehovah's Witnesses guilty since late July 2020, six of whom have received jail sentences. The four defendants in one case in Bryansk Region will not be imprisoned as they had already served the time in pre-trial detention. Two men in another case in Kemerovo Region, however, will spend more than a year in jail if their appeal is unsuccessful.

The period between July and November 2020 has seen both the largest fine and the longest suspended sentence imposed since the prosecution of Jehovah's Witnesses began after the 2017 liquidation of their Administrative Centre. Also seen was the first acquittal of a Jehovah's Witness on "extremism" charges in three years, in a case unconnected to the 2017 nationwide ban on Jehovah's Witness activities.

Eight Jehovah's Witnesses and one Muslim reader of Nursi's works are already serving terms in general-regime labour camps (ispravitelniye kolonii, "correctional colonies"). After the end of his sentence, another Muslim who studied Nursi's writings was stripped of his Russian citizenship, and remains in a detention centre for foreigners and stateless persons (see list at base of this article).

Two Jehovah's Witnesses and one Muslim from Russian-occupied Ukrainian territory in the Crimean peninsula are also in labour camps in Russia.

Two of the Jehovah's Witnesses convicted within Russia – Danish citizen Dennis Ole Christensen (born 18 December 1972) and Konstantin Viktorovich Bazhenov (born 10 May 1975) – have sought early release, but courts have refused to grant it.

Bazhenov and Feliks Khasanovich Makhammadiyev (born 14 December 1984), who were convicted together in Saratov in 2019, have been stripped of their Russian citizenship (as has Muslim reader of Nursi's works Yevgeny Kim).

Makhammadiyev, four other Saratov Jehovah's Witnesses, and Nursi reader Kim have all been tortured in detention, but no suspect torturer is known to have been arrested or put on criminal trial, against international human rights law.

One man who met with other Muslims to read Nursi's works (Ilgar Vagif-ogly Aliyev, born 16 February 1977) is currently known to be in prison, while another (Artur Abdulgamidovich Kaltuyev, born 15 June 1986) has recently been released. Three more Muslims who met to read Nursi's works are known to be under investigation in the Tatarstan and Dagestan Republics, one of whom is under house arrest (see forthcoming articles).

The Investigative Committee, police, and FSB security service continue to raid Jehovah's Witness homes, and investigate and detain individuals across the country. Prosecutions are currently underway in 55 out of 83 federal subjects in Russia within its internationally recognised borders.

Varying punishments

After being kept under FSB security service or police surveillance for some months, most targeted Jehovah's Witnesses (like Muslim readers of Nursi's works) are prosecuted for "organising" (Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 1), or "participating in" (Part 2), "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".

The activities prosecuted under both these parts of Criminal Code Article 282.2 are very similar, including meeting in each other's homes to pray and sing together, study sacred texts, and to discuss shared beliefs.

Possible punishments under Criminal Code Article 282.2 are:

Part 1 – six to ten years' imprisonment; or a 400,000 to 800,000 Rouble fine;
Part 2 – two to six years' imprisonment; a 300,000 to 600,000 Rouble fine; or one to four years' assigned labour.

Several Jehovah's Witnesses have also been charged under Criminal Code Article 282.3, Part 1 ("Financing extremist activity"), apparently by continuing to collect donations for activities from fellow believers after the 2017 ban on Jehovah's Witness activity.

Possible punishments under Criminal Code Article 282.3, Part 1 are four to eight years' imprisonment; a 300,000 to 700,000 Rouble fine; or two to five years' assigned labour.

Other charges have been brought against Jehovah's Witnesses and Muslims under Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 1.1 ("Inclination, recruitment or other involvement of a person in an extremist organisation").

Possible punishments are four to eight years' imprisonment; a 300,000 to 700,000 Rouble fine; or two to five years' assigned labour.

Judges can also impose a range of restrictions on freedom both during suspended sentences, and for certain periods after a person's release from imprisonment.

Despite the similarities in the activities being prosecuted, trials have so far ended in a variety of sentences – from prison terms of several years, to suspended sentences of varying lengths, to a range of fines. There has also been one sentence of assigned labour, later changed to a fine.

No one has been acquitted, though judges have returned some cases to prosecutors who later resubmit them. Defendants have sometimes succeeded in getting sentences reduced, or having cases sent for retrial on appeal, though no conviction has yet been overturned.

It is unclear why similar activities should lead to differing sentences. Jehovah's Witness lawyers attribute it to judges' level of bias. There is also "a second factor", they told Forum 18 on 9 November – that is, "how in this region or by this particular judge it is [deemed acceptable] to act when a judge is convinced of the innocence of the accused". In such cases, judges "pass a guilty verdict, assigning a penalty below the lower limit, a suspended sentence, or a non-custodial penalty, or return the criminal case to the prosecutor". In such cases, even though the judges "understand that the person is innocent", they "also understand that the percentage of acquittals is not high – it is not customary in Russia to make acquittals".

A pattern of varying sentences for similar activities also happens when religious organisations, of a variety of faiths, are prosecuted for not showing their full official names on literature, online, and most frequently on buildings.

"Even lenient punishment is punishment"

The Jehovah's Witness lawyers also note that it is difficult to say whether it is better to receive a fine or a suspended sentence: "A fine means that you have to suffer materially right now. A suspended sentence means that you need to live under stress for many years, and the sentence can be changed to a real one [i.e. the convicted person could be sent to prison]. Even lenient punishment is punishment, the consequences of which will be felt for years."

Kemerovo Region: sentenced to four years' imprisonment

On 2 September 2020, after a criminal case lasting more than two years, Beryozovsky City Court sentenced Sergey Alekseyevich Britvin (born 18 August 1965) and Vadim Anatolyevich Levchuk (born 6 February 1972) to four years' imprisonment in a general-regime labour camp under Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 1. Prosecutors had requested prison terms of six and a half years.

Britvin and Levchuk have challenged their conviction, and expect the appeal hearing to take place between late December and mid-January at Kemerovo Regional Court.

FSB security service officers arrested Britvin and Levchuk in July 2018 during a series of raids on Jehovah's Witness homes in the town of Beryozovsky. Although the FSB originally opened the case under Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 2 ("Organisation of the activities of a banned extremist organisation", investigators later had the two men charged with "organising the activities of a banned extremist organisation" (Part 1) because they had had conversations with friends on religious topics, Jehovah's Witnesses stated.

In December 2019, the 8th Cassational Court in Kemerovo ruled that the last six months of Britvin and Levchuk's pre-trial detention had been unlawful, and ordered that they should be placed under house arrest instead.

Forum 18 wrote to the Kemerovo Regional Prosecutor's Office before the start of the working day of 10 November 2020, asking why prosecutors had sought a jail sentence, who had been harmed by Britvin and Levchuk's activities, and why meeting for prayer and Bible study should be considered a criminal offence. Forum 18 received no reply by the end of the working day in Kemerovo on 23 November.

"Of course I was upset [at the verdict], since I wanted to believe that the court would sort it out and acquit him," Sergey's wife Natalya Britvina told Forum 18 on 12 November. "After all, he has nothing to do with what he is accused of under that Article. I want to have hope in the appeal court – maybe it will sort it out and come to a just decision."

Britvin and Levchuk had already spent more than 520 days in detention and more than 250 days under house arrest by the time Judge Irina Vorobyova issued her 2 September 2020 decision.

Under amendments to Criminal Code Article 72, signed into law in July 2018, one day in detention is taken as equivalent to a day and a half in a general-regime labour camp, while two days under house arrest equates to one day's imprisonment.

Britvin and Levchuk should therefore serve about a year and a half if their convictions enter legal force, but the exact term remains unclear. After release, they would be subject to a further year of restrictions on freedom, and would also be prohibited from holding certain jobs for three years.

"I had hoped that the court would see my husband's innocence"

"I was upset when I heard the verdict," Vadim's wife Tatyana Levchuk told Forum 18 on 12 November, "since I had hoped that the court would see my husband's innocence and come to a different decision – if not acquittal, then a lighter sentence. The criminal prosecution of my husband is unjust, as he is not guilty." Both she and Natalya Britvina noted, however, that the outcome of the case was not unexpected.

"On the one hand, I understood that Sergey could get a prison term, since other Jehovah's Witnesses in our country in different cities had received jail sentences. On the other hand, there was nothing to pin on him, therefore there was a glimmer of hope," Britvina commented.

"Undeterred even by Covid-19, Russia continues to subject peaceful family men like Sergey and Vadim to the unsanitary and potentially deadly confines of prison," Jehovah's Witness spokesperson Jarrod Lopes said in a press statement on 2 September.

Britvin and Levchuk are currently being held in Investigation Prison No. 4 in Anzhero-Sudzhensk, about 75 kms (50 miles) north of Beryozovsky, while their appeal is pending. Levchuk has not complained about conditions there, his wife Tatyana told Forum 18. "Seeing how Vadim conducts himself, fellow detainees and staff treat him with respect." Both Levchuk and Britvin have been able to receive parcels and letters, though with some delays.

As a disabled person, Britvin is allowed a "disabled cell" in which he can lie down, his wife Natalya explained to Forum 18. "I'm very grateful to them for that." It is so cold, however, that he must constantly wear two jumpers and two pairs of trousers. She added that she takes him fresh colostomy bags and medications "all the time".

"My husband is doing well and that makes it easier for me, although I'm very worried for his health," Britvin's wife told Forum 18. "He tries not to lose heart – on the contrary, during visits, he's still supporting me."

Eight days after Britvin and Levchuk's conviction, a third Beryozovsky Jehovah's Witness, Khasan Abduvaitovich Kogut, was found guilty at the same court under Article 282.2, Part 2 and given a suspended sentence.

Britvin and Levchuk have been on the Federal Financial Monitoring Service (Rosfinmonitoring) "List of Terrorists and Extremists" since 22 November 2018. Banks are obliged to freeze the assets of people on this list, although small transactions (up to 10,000 Roubles) are permitted.

Bryansk: Convicted, but already served equivalent term

In the Bryansk Region town of Novozybkov on 3 September 2020, judges handed four more Jehovah's Witnesses jail sentences, but those convicted have avoided spending time in prison as they have already served an equivalent term in pre-trial detention.

Prosecutors had requested suspended sentences ranging from three years to seven years and ten months, with varying sets of restrictions. Forum 18 wrote to Bryansk Regional Prosecutor's Office before the start of the working day of 10 November asking who had been harmed by the four Jehovah's Witnesses' activities, and why meeting for prayer and Bible study should be considered a criminal offence. Forum 18 received no reply by the end of the working day in Bryansk Region on 23 November.

On 3 September, Judge Larisa Solovets of Novozybkov City Court sentenced:

- Vladimir Aleksandrovich Khokhlov (born 9 April 1977) and Eduard Vladimirovich Zhinzhirov (born 9 November 1971) (both convicted under Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 1 and Article 282.3, Part 1) to one year and three months' imprisonment plus one year of restrictions on freedom;
- and Tatyana Viktorovna Shamsheva (born 7 June 1977) and Olga Sergeyevna Silayeva (born 11 May 1988) (both convicted under Article 282.2, Part 2) to one year's imprisonment and six months of restrictions on freedom.

It is unclear why the judge imposed a non-suspended jail sentence which would not be served.

Shamsheva and Silayeva (since 10 October 2019) and Khokhlov and Zhinzhirov (since 11 December 2019) all remain on the Rosfinmonitoring "List of Terrorists and Extremists".

Inclusion on the List imposes numerous difficulties on everyday life. For instance, Shamsheva's car insurance has expired, lawyer Anton Omelchenko told Forum 18 on 12 November. She cannot renew it and therefore cannot drive.

All four are under a night-time curfew (although night shifts at work are allowed) and are barred from changing their places of residence. Khokhlov and Zhinzhikov must report to probation authorities twice a month, Shamsheva and Silayeva once a month. They are also prohibited from participating in any religious organisation – the men for three years (with an additional ban on taking leadership roles), the women for one year.

Defendants have already served time

Khokhlov and Zhinzhikov had spent more than 300 days, and Shamsheva and Silayeva nearly 250 days, in different detention centres in Bryansk Region. All four were therefore freed from the courtroom, but remain under restrictions for the periods stipulated in the court ruling.

"At first glance, the sentence does not appear too harsh, but it is still a guilty verdict," Jehovah's Witness spokesperson Yaroslav Sivulsky commented on 4 September. "People spent many months in jail on the basis of fictitious accusations." The four appealed unsuccessfully against their convictions on 28 October 2020 at Bryansk Regional Court. The prosecution did not challenge the sentence.

The defence is working on possible appeals to the First Cassational Court in Saratov, and if then necessary to the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) in Strasbourg, lawyer Anton Omelchenko told Forum 18.

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List of those convicted on "extremism"-related charges for exercising freedom of religion or belief, by category of punishment (regional headings refer to where people were tried, not where they are imprisoned).

CURRENT IMPRISONMENTS SENTENCES HAVE ENTERED LEGAL FORCE

- Republic of Dagestan

Izberbash City Court
28 May 2018

1) Ilgar Vagif-ogly Aliyev (born 16 February 1977) – 8 years + 2 years' restrictions on freedom

Criminal Code Articles: 282.2, Part 1; 282.2, Part 1.1

Appeal: unsuccessful – 25 July 2018, Supreme Court of the Republic of Dagestan

Prison address: 410086, Saratovskaya oblast, g. Saratov, Peschano-Umetsky trakt, p. Yelshanka, FKU Ispravitel'naya koloniya No. 33 UFSIN Rossii po Saratovskoy oblasti

- Oryol Region

Railway District Court, Oryol
6 February 2019

2) Dennis Ole Christensen (born 18 December 1972 – Danish citizen) – 6 years

Criminal Code Article: 282.2, Part 1

Appeal: unsuccessful – 23 May 2019, Oryol Regional Court

Prison address: 307754 Kurskaya oblast, g. Lgov, ul. Primakova 23A, FKU Ispravitelnaya koloniya No. 3 UFSIN Rossii po Kurskoy oblasti

Christensen has attempted unsuccessfully to gain early release – a court ruling of 23 June 2020, which replaced his remaining term with a fine, was challenged by prosecutors, and Christensen's request was turned down on re-examination on 23 October 2020.

- Saratov Region

Lenin District Court, Saratov

19 September 2019

3) Konstantin Viktorovich Bazhenov (born 10 May 1975) – 3 years and 6 months

4) Aleksey Vladimirovich Budenchuk (born 27 July 1982) – 3 years and 6 months

5) Gennady Vasilyevich German (born 12 June 1969) – 2 years and 6 months

6) Roman Aleksandrovich Gridasov (16 September 1978) – 2 years and 6 months

7) Feliks Khasanovich Makhammadiyev (born 14 December 1984) – 3 years

8) Aleksey Petrovich Miretsky (born 14 December 1975) – 2 years and 6 months

All six also have 1 year's restrictions on freedom + 5-year ban on holding leadership positions in any public organisation. Some of the six have been tortured

Criminal Code Article: 282.2, Part 1

Appeal: unsuccessful – 20 December 2019, Saratov Regional Court

Prison address: Bazhenov – 433510 Ulyanovskaya oblast, g. Dimitrovgrad, ul. Osipenko 22, FKU Ispravitelnaya koloniya No. 3 UFSIN Rossii po Ulyanovskoy oblasti; others – 460026, g. Orenburg, Krymsky pereulok 119, FKU Ispravitelnaya koloniya No. 1 UFSIN Rossii po Orenburgskoy oblasti

On 28 October 2020, a court refused Bazhenov early release and the replacement of the rest of his term with a fine. Budenchuk and Miretsky have also applied for early release; it is unknown when their cases will be heard in court.

(Bazhenov in Saratov should not be confused with fellow Jehovah's Witness Konstantin Aleksandrovich Bazhenov from Kamchatka, given a two-year suspended sentence in September 2020.)

- Tomsk Region

October District Court, Tomsk

5 November 2019

9) Sergey Gennadyevich Klimov (born 26 March 1970) – 6 years + 1 year's restriction on freedom; 5-year ban on any educational activity and posting material on the internet

Criminal Code Article: 282.2, Part 1

Appeal: unsuccessful – 20 February 2020, Tomsk Regional Court

Prison address: 414044 Astrakhanskaya oblast, g. Astrakhan, ul. Sovetskoy Gvardii 50, FKU Ispravitelnaya koloniya No. 8 UFSIN Rossii po Astrakhanskoy oblasti

SENTENCED TO IMPRISONMENT – DETAINED AWAITING APPEAL

- Kemerovo Region

Beryozovsky City Court

2 September 2020

1) Sergey Alekseyevich Britvin (born 18 August 1965) – 4 years;

2) Vadim Anatolyevich Levchuk (born 6 February 1972) – 4 years

Criminal Code Article 282.2 Part 1

Appeal due late December 2020/mid-January 2021, Kemerovo Regional Court

Detention centre address: 652470, Kemerovskaya oblast, g. Anzhero-Sudzhensk, ul. Chekistov 1, FKU Sledstvenniy izolyator No. 4 UFSIN Rossii po Kemerovskoy oblasti

DETAINED AWAITING POSSIBLE DEPORTATION

- Khabarovsk Region

Blagoveshchensk City Court
19 June 2017

1) Yevgeny Lvovich Kim (born 5 October 1974) – 3 years and 9 months
Criminal Code Articles: 282.2, Part 1, and 282, Part 1

Tortured while in pre-trial detention in 2015; no suspect torturer known to have been arrested or put on criminal trial. Immediately Kim was released deprived of Russian citizenship and left stateless.

Railway District Court, Khabarovsk
10 April 2019

fined under Administrative Code Article 18.8, Part 1 for failing to have documentation and ordered deported.

Foreigners' detention centre address: 680003 Khabarovskiy kray, g. Khabarovsk, ul. Repina 3, Tsentr vremennogo sodержaniya inostrannikh grazhdan

On 28 October 2020, Kim applied unsuccessfully for cancellation of his criminal record (snyatiye sudimosti). On 10 November, the Institute of Law and Public Policy lodged an appeal on Kim's behalf at the Constitutional Court, questioning the constitutionality of Administrative Code Article 18.8, Part 1.1 ("Violation by a foreign citizen or stateless person of the residence regime of the Russian Federation, expressed in the absence of documents confirming the right to reside in the Russian Federation") and Article 3.10, Part 5, which gives judges the right to detain people before deportation but does not impose any time limit.

Persecution against religious organizations and believers in October monitored by Sova Center

HRWF (18.11.2020) – <https://bit.ly/36OiITA> - Every month, Sova Center publishes an update of the persecution of believers of all faiths in Russia.

Muslims

In mid-October, a sentence was issued in St. Petersburg against Muso Jalolov, a citizen of Tajikistan. He was charged under Article 205.5 Part 2 of the Criminal Code with participation in the activities of the radical Islamic party Hizb ut-Tahrir, recognized in Russia as a terrorist organization. Jalolov was sentenced to 10 years of imprisonment, with the first three years to be spent in prison and the remainder of the term - in a maximum security penal colony. In addition, two citizens of Uzbekistan were detained in the Kaliningrad Region on suspicion of their involvement in Hizb ut-Tahrir. We believe that prosecuting Hizb ut-Tahrir members under the "terrorist articles" of the Criminal Code merely on the basis of party activities (holding meetings, reading literature, etc.) is inappropriate, since this party was never known to engage in terrorism.

In Saransk, the court issued a fine of two thousand rubles to Ziaki Aizatullin, the former mufti of the Regional Spiritual Board of Muslims of Mordovia (RDUM RM), and a fine of 100 thousand rubles to the Uskudar mosque (of which he was a mufti until mid-August 2020) as a legal entity, both under Article 20.29 of the Administrative Code. The case

was based on the testimony by a parishioner, who claimed that Aizatullin had sold him *Selected Hadiths* – a book, recognized as extremist, written by Sheikh Muhammad Yusuf Kandhlawi, the ideologist of the banned Islamic religious movement Tablighi Jamaat. Law enforcement agencies also reported finding a copy of the book in the mufti's office with a price tag on it. In addition, in August, Aizatullin's nephews were among those suspected of Tablighi Jamaat involvement under Article 282.2 of the Criminal Code (organizing the activities of an extremist organization or participation in such). We consider the cases against Ziaki Aizatullin and his nephews unjustified. From our point of view, both the *Selected Hadiths* and Tablighi Jamaat were banned inappropriately. The movement promotes fundamentalist Islam but was never implicated in any calls for violence.

Jehovah's Witnesses

Russian courts issued four sentences against Jehovah's Witnesses in October. Sergei Mysin and Natalya Mysina, Mikhail Zelensky, Andrei Tabakov, Alexander Ganin and Khoren Khachikyan received suspended sentences ranging from two and a half to four years under Article 282.2 Part 2 of the Criminal Code (participating in the activities of an extremist organization) in Ulyanovsk. In Kostroma, Sergei and Valeriya Raiman were found guilty by the court and are facing suspended sentences of eight and seven years of imprisonment respectively under Article 282.2 Parts 1 and 2 (organizing the activities of an extremist organization and participating in it). A court in Kirov fined Anatoly Tokarev 500 thousand rubles under Article 282.2 Part 1 of the Criminal Code.

In Mayskoye of the Kabardino-Balkarian Republic, the lengthy trial of Yuri Zalipaev came to an end. He was charged under Article 280 Part 1 of the Criminal Code (public calls for extremist activity); according to the investigation, he called for beatings of Orthodox and Muslims during his sermon. The court acquitted him based on the results of the forensic examination. Zalipaev had also been charged under Article 282 Part 1 of the Criminal Code (incitement to religious hatred), but this charge was dropped in 2019 after the partial decriminalization of this legal norm.

There were also reports of several newly opened criminal cases. Evgeny Zhukov, Vladimir Sakada, Igor Shmidt and Vladimir Maladyka were arrested in Sevastopol in early October under Article 282.2 Part 1 of the Criminal Code. In Blagoveshchensk of the Amur Region, the case under Article 282.2 Part 2 of the Criminal Code was opened against Sergei Kardakov; Alexander Rakovsky was charged under the same article in Pavlovo of the Nizhny Novgorod Region.

In mid-October, Yuri Kim from Nikolsk of the Penza Region faced charges under Article 282.2 Part 1 of the Criminal Code (he died late in the month); Konstantin Zotov and Natalya Kochneva from Berezovsky of the Sverdlovsk Region were charged under Part 2 of the same article. Two additional suspects have appeared in Zeya, the Amur Region.

Two residents of Khabarovsk Krai were detained in late October: Alexei Ukhov, a resident of Sovetskaya Gavan charged under Article 282.2 Part 1 of the Criminal Code, and Ilya Degtyarenko from Vyazemsky charged under Article 282.2 Part 2 of the Criminal Code.

In addition, a court in St. Petersburg reportedly accepted for trial a prosecutorial claim seeking to block the Jehovah's Witnesses *JW Library* app in Google Play and App Store and adding it to the Federal List of Extremist Materials.

We consider inappropriate the bans against Jehovah's Witnesses text as extremist, the bans against religious organizations for distributing these texts, and persecution against believers for their involvement in Jehovah's Witnesses communities.

Sanctions for Anti-Religious Statements

A criminal case was opened in the Oryol Region in late October under Article 148 Part 1 of the Criminal Code (public actions expressing obvious disrespect for society and

committed in order to offend the religious feelings of believers) against a resident of the Verkhovsky District. According to the investigation, in April 2020, the defendant wrote a comment on VKontakte that insulted the feelings of believers. Unfortunately, we have no information that would allow us to identify the comment in question. However, we generally believe that the vague concept of “insulting the religious feelings of believers” does not and cannot have a clear legal meaning. In our opinion, if the text contained insults aimed at representatives of a particular confession, and aroused hatred towards them, then the actions of the suspect should have been qualified under Article 20.3.1 of the Code of Administrative Offences; otherwise, he should not have been prosecuted at all.

Special bimonthly FORB Digest (01-15.11.2020)

13.11.20 - A Cherkessk resident is suspected of extremism for talking about the Bible.

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2020/11/3.html>

In the morning of November 12, 2020, a group of law enforcement officers led by an investigator of the FSB for Karachay-Cherkessia V. Drakin repeated the search of Yelena Menchikova. Dracinom repeated the search of Elena Menchikova.

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13.11.20 - Crimea: Freedom of thought, conscience and religion (October)

In October, the “justice’s courts” of Crimea received at least 2 new administrative trials against members of religious organizations under Art. 5.26-4 (*Illegal missionary activity*). 31 One of them is against Imam Abliakim Galiyev for holding Friday prayers (juma namaz).

On October 14, “judge of justice” Peter Kireyev imposed fine of RUR30,000 to the Catholic Church of the Byzantine Rite — a parish of transferring the relics of Nicholas the Wonderworker (Yalta) under RF CoAO Art.5.26-3 for “acting as a religious organization without the official full name indicated”.

In total, at the end of October, the CHRG recorded 101 administrative trials in Crimea against religious organizations and their members under Art. 5.26 of the Code of Administrative Offences of the Russian Federation. Within the framework of these proceedings, imposed fines totaled to at least RUR 1,340,500.

Crimean Human Rights Situation Review (October 2020)

[Continue reading...](#)

11.11.20 - Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe notes Russian repression in Crimea

Link to full text in Russian: https://risu.ua/ru/ekspert-rasskazal-o-presledovanii-veryan-pcu-musulman-i-svidetelej-iegovy-v-okkupirovannom-krymu_n113386

In a year in occupied Crimea, the number of cases fabricated by Russian security forces involving Muslims increased to 70 and the persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses and ousting of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (PTsU) intensified.

Continue reading...

11.11.20 - Spiritual Muslim Board of Russia denies existence of overwhelming support for ban on marrying non-Muslim women

Moscow, November 11, Interfax - The Spiritual Muslim Board of Russia has clarified that only the Ulema Council, a council of influential theologians, supports a ban on Muslim men marrying women of other religions, while a number of the board's members are opposed to this decision.

Continue reading...

10.11.20. Pentecostal preacher fined for message on social network

Link to full text in Russian: <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/4566099>

The Zavodsky district court of Kemerovo fined the pastor of the New Generation Church of Christians of Evangelical Faith (Pentecostals), Andrei Matiuzhov, 10,000 rubles for inciting hatred. The case against the clergyman was opened on the basis of materials of the regional directorate of the F.S.B. The issue was a video sermon by Andrei Matiuzhov, "Love of money is the root of all evils," in which law enforcement perceived, among other things, a statement against Islam.

Continue reading...

06.11.20 - Russian high court lightens burden on protestant churches

Link to full text in Russian:
http://www.rapsinews.ru/judicial_news/20201106/306474970.html

The activity of a religious organization does not presuppose assuring free access for citizens to liturgical facilities that are located within residential buildings, and consequently it has no obligation to install external signs with its name. It is sufficient for there to be tablets with pertinent information inside the facilities. This is said by a new ruling of the Russian Constitutional Court [CCRF] that was published on its official website.

Continue reading...

06.11.20 - Constitutional court clarifies requirements of procedure for postinf name of religious organization

Link to full text in Russian:
http://www.sclj.ru/news/detail.php?SECTION_ID=521&ELEMENT_ID=8315

The Constitutional Court of the Russian Federation published Order No. 45-P of 3 November 2020 in the case concerning verification of the constitutionality of part 3 of article 5.26 of the Russian Code of Administrative Violations of Law and point 8 of article 8 of the federal law "On freedom of conscience and religious associations," in connection with an appeal by the religious organization Word of Life Church of Christians of Evangelical Faith (Pentecostals) of Dolgoprudny.

[Continue reading...](#)

05.11.20 - Putin said inadmissible to hurt feelings of believers, to allow extremism - Peskov

Moscow, November 5, Interfax - Russian President Vladimir Putin has stated the inadmissibility of hurting feelings of believers and of allowing manifestations of extremism at a meeting with members of religious associations, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

[Continue reading...](#)

05.11.20 - Putin backs idea of int'l ban on insulting religious feelings

Moscow, November 5, Interfax - A ban on insulting the feelings of the faithful should be enshrined in international law, Russian President Vladimir Putin said.

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04.11.20 - Two more Saratov-based believers await an early release trial in exchange for a fine

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2020/11/2.html>

Saratov residents Alexey Budenchuk and Alexey Miretsky, convicted for their faith, have served more than half their sentence. The defense petitioned for their early release and replacement of the part of the sentence that had not been served with a fine.

[Continue reading...](#)

03.11.20 - Freedom of speech mustn't hurt religious feelings - Russia's Matviyenko

Moscow, November 3, Interfax - Freedom of speech is an unconditional value, but no red lines must be crossed by insulting religious feelings, Russian Federation Council Speaker Valentina Matviyenko said.

[Continue reading...](#)

03.11.20 - 400 victims of a legal collusion: the number of Jehovah's Witnesses accused of extremism is growing

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2020/11/1.html>

In 3.5 years after the liquidation of all Jehovah's Witnesses groups, the number of innocent [victims](#) exceeded four hundred. From Kamchatka to Kaliningrad, [law-abiding believers](#) are accused of "extremism."

[Continue reading...](#)

02.11.20 - Russian Orthodox Church advises France to adopt law protecting believers' feelings

Moscow, November 2, Interfax - France needs to adopt a law on the protection of believers' feelings in connection with the publication of cartoons which led to an attack on people in a catholic cathedral in Nice, the Russian Orthodox Church said.

[Continue reading...](#)

02.11.20 - Jehovah's Witness dies while awaiting trial

Link to full text in Russian: <https://ovdinfo.org/express-news/2020/11/02/60-letniy-svidetel-iegovy-u-kotorogo-proshel-obysk-skonchalsya-posle-poezdki>

Yury Kim, a Jehovah's Witness from Nikolsk in Penza oblast, died after a trip to court in which he familiarized himself with the order regarding a search in his residence. This is reported on the website of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia.

[Continue reading...](#)

02.11.20 - Criminal case opened for arranging and participating in activity of extremist organization of Jehovah's witnesses

Link to full text in Russian: <https://penza.sledcom.ru/news/item/1507868/>

The second department for investigation of especially important cases of the regional Investigative Committee of Russia (S.K.R.) opened a criminal case on a charge of arranging the activity of an extremist organization (part 1 of article 282.2 CC RF) and participating in it (part 2 of article 282.2 CC RF). The criminal case is being investigated with the operational support of the directorate of the Russian F.S.B. for Penza oblast.

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CRIMEA: "My husband does not admit any guilt"

"My husband does not admit any guilt," says Svetlana Sakada, wife of one of four Jehovah's Witnesses in pre-trial detention after 1 October raids in Sevastopol. She insists that Vladimir Sakada "has conducted no crimes against the foundations of the state". The four face up to ten years' imprisonment if convicted on "extremism"-related charges. Already on trial in Sevastopol facing the same charges is fellow Jehovah's Witness Viktor Stashevsky.

By Felix Corley

Forum18 (13.11.2020) - <https://bit.ly/2Jbytwb> - Russia's FSB security service is investigating four more Crimean Jehovah's Witnesses on "extremism"-related criminal charges to punish them for exercising freedom of religion or belief. Police launched raids on nine homes in the port city of Sevastopol on 1 October. Courts then ordered Yevgeny Zhukov – the former head of the registered community – and three others held in pre-trial detention. The men face up to ten years' imprisonment if convicted.

"They burst into our home at 6 o'clock in the morning," Natalya Maladyka – wife of one of the detained men - told human rights group Crimean Solidarity. "They took a radio and all our [electronic] devices. We don't understand why they treat us like that." Svetlana Sakada, wife of another of the detainees, insisted that her husband "has conducted no crimes against the foundations of the state". She added: "My husband does not admit any guilt" (see below).

Russia's FSB security service in Crimea and Sevastopol refused to put Forum 18 through to its Investigation Department, which is conducting the prosecutions. Investigations and prosecutions of people of different faiths exercising their freedom of religion and belief are often conducted by the same FSB officials (see below).

The criminal trial of another Crimean Jehovah's Witness, Viktor Stashevsky, started again in Sevastopol on 19 October after the judge who had been hearing the case resigned from the court. The next hearing in the trial is due on the afternoon of 19 November. He too faces up to ten years' imprisonment if convicted (see below).

The FSB Investigator described Stashevsky as "the ideological inspirer of the extremist organisation, using his authority, well-developed strong-willed qualities and organisational abilities, as well as special knowledge and propaganda skills he had previously acquired" (see below).

Russia imposed its anti-"extremism" legislation in Crimea following its March 2014 annexation of the peninsula from Ukraine. This included imposing the 2009 ban as "extremist" of the Muslim missionary movement Tabligh Jamaat. The 2017 Russian ban as "extremist" of all Jehovah's Witness communities across Russia was also imposed on Crimea.

Russia's annexation of Crimea is not recognised by Ukraine or internationally.

Crimean prisoners of conscience jailed for exercising freedom of religion and belief

Since the Russian annexation of Crimea, courts have already jailed three individuals as "extremists" for exercising freedom of religion or belief:

- Muslim prisoner of conscience Renat Suleimanov, held since 2017 and sentenced to four years in January 2019 for meeting openly in mosques with three friends to discuss their faith;
- Jehovah's Witness Sergei Filatov, sentenced to six years with five years additional restrictions in March 2020 for meeting with family and friends to discuss religious themes;
- and Jehovah's Witness Artyom Gerasimov, sentenced to six years in June 2020 for meeting with others to discuss the Bible.

All three prisoners of conscience were transferred to Russia to serve their jail terms, where they are held under harsh conditions which violate the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (known as the Mandela Rules – A/C.3/70/L.3). The FSB security service continues to question associates of one of the prisoners.

Three other Muslims convicted in the same 2019 trial as Suleimanov were given suspended sentences. The four were punished for meeting openly in mosques to discuss their faith.

Sevastopol Four: Nine homes raided

Four more Jehovah's Witnesses from the port city of Sevastopol are facing criminal prosecution on extremism-related charges, which they reject: Yevgeny Sergeyeovich Zhukov (born 1969), Vladimir Ivanovich Maladyka (born 1963), Vladimir Fedorovich Sakada (born 1970) and Igor Yakovlevich Schmidt (born 1972).

Jehovah's Witnesses say that police tried to plant a banned book on the community during a raid in July 2015 in an attempt to fabricate a case against Zhukov, the then head of the registered Sevastopol Jehovah's Witness organisation. The raid came a year after Russia invaded and annexed Crimea and before Russia declared Jehovah's Witnesses "extremist".

In 2017, an administrative case was brought against Zhukov, but the case was sent back for correction.

On 1 October 2020 police raided at least nine homes in the port city of Sevastopol, Jehovah's Witnesses said.

Raids began in the early morning and lasted several hours. Maladyka's home was among those raided. Officers seized a packet of dried milk from the family's fridge, claiming it might be drugs, and sent Maladyka and his wife Natalya for forced assessment at a drug treatment centre, Jehovah's Witnesses noted. An expert analysis subsequently found the dried milk to be dried milk.

After the raids, officers took five Jehovah's Witnesses for interrogation. They released Natalya Maladyka on the evening of 1 October, but sent Vladimir Maladyka, Zhukov, Sakada and Schmidt to the temporary Detention Centre.

"People broke into our home and conducted a search," Svetlana Sakada told the human rights group Crimean Solidarity. "All this was unlawful as we are peaceful, law-abiding people. My husband has conducted no crimes against the foundations of the state."

Natalya Maladyka complained about the way officers conducted the "illegal" raids. "They burst into our home at 6 o'clock in the morning," she told Crimean Solidarity. "They took a radio and all our [electronic] devices. We don't understand why they treat us like that."

Sevastopol Four: "Extremism" charges

The four Sevastopol Jehovah's Witnesses are being investigated in two separate cases 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"). The maximum punishment is a 10-year jail term.

The first case – against Zhukov, Maladyka and Sakada – was initially led by Senior Investigator for especially serious cases Captain Yuri Andreyev, of the Russian FSB security service's Crimea and Sevastopol Investigation Department.

Captain Andreyev has previously brought criminal charges of "public calls for extremist activity" against 34-year-old Imam Rustem Abilev which local residents do not believe. Abilev was convicted on 10 October 2019 and fined three months' average local wages.

The case against three of the Jehovah's Witnesses following the 1 October 2020 raids was later handed to a new Investigator from the same Department, Lieutenant Aleksandr Chumakin.

Lieutenant Chumakin was the Russian FSB security service Investigator in the case against fellow Jehovah's Witness Sergei Filatov, who is serving a six-year jail term in a Russian labour camp. He was also the Investigator who prepared fellow Jehovah's Witness Viktor Stashevsky's case (see below).

The second case – against Schmidt – is being led by Senior Investigator for especially serious cases Captain Sergei Bosiyev of the Russian FSB's Crimea and Sevastopol's Investigation Department.

The officer who answered the phone at the Russian FSB of Crimea and Sevastopol in Simferopol on 13 November refused to put Forum 18 through to the Investigation Department. Lieutenant Chumakin's phone went unanswered the same day.

Sevastopol Four: Pre-trial detention

On 2 October, a court in Sevastopol ordered the four Jehovah's Witnesses held in pre-trial detention as they face criminal charges. Lenin District Court ordered the three men in the first case – Vladimir Maladyka, Yevgeny Zhukov, and Vladimir Sakada – held until 30 November. In the second case, the same court ordered Igor Schmidt held until 23 November. The four were taken to the Investigation Prison in Simferopol.

Sakada was ordered held in detention "on the basis that he could go into hiding", his wife Svetlana Sakada told Crimean Solidarity after the hearing. "My husband does not admit any guilt." She said they would appeal against the detention order. "We will keep pushing for our husbands to be returned to us or at least for them to soften the terms of restriction – even to having to sign a pledge not to leave the area or house arrest."

Maladyka's wife Natalya Maladyka also complained about the detention order. "Of course we're going to fight this," she told Crimean Solidarity.

All four appealed against the decision to hold them in pre-trial detention. They insist that they did not take part in a Jehovah's Witness organisation after it was banned, but that the FSB security service is simply punishing them for their religious faith. However, in separate hearings on 16 and 22 October, judges at Sevastopol City Court rejected their appeals, according to the court website.

The four men's address in Investigation Prison:

295006 Krym
g. Simferopol
Bulvar Lenina 4
Sledstvenny Izolyator No. 1

Sevastopol: Trial restarted under new judge

Another Crimean Jehovah's Witness, Viktor Vladimirovich Stashevsky (born 11 July 1966), is already on trial in Sevastopol facing "extremism"-related charges. He too faces a possible long prison term if convicted.

Stashevsky – who is married with two children – also looks after his 85-year-old mother.

The Russian FSB security service launched a criminal case against Stashevsky on 31 May 2019 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").

The Russian FSB claimed that Stashevsky had "continued the activity and propagated the ideas of Jehovah's Witnesses, conducted meetings, and held religious talks".

On 4 June 2019, without showing any warrants, Russia's FSB raided nine homes in Sevastopol, including that of a 91-year-old woman. Officers threatened to plant drugs in the homes, Jehovah's Witnesses stated.

After being held overnight in a detention centre, the investigator allowed Stashevsky to be freed under a pledge not to leave the city.

On 11 July 2019, the investigator had Stashevsky added to the Russian Federal Financial Monitoring Service (Rosfinmonitoring) "List of Terrorists and Extremists", whose assets banks are obliged to freeze (although small transactions are permitted).

FSB Investigator Filipp Rybalka completed the criminal case on 21 February 2020. He described Stashevsky as "the ideological inspirer of the extremist organisation, using his authority, well-developed strong-willed qualities and organisational abilities, as well as special knowledge and propaganda skills he had previously acquired".

Investigator Rybalka claimed that Stashevsky "deliberately took active organisational actions with the aim of continuing the unlawful activities of an extremist organisation prohibited by the court".

The case against Stashevsky reached Sevastopol's Gagarin District Court on 30 March, where it was assigned to Judge Valentin Norets. A preliminary hearing was held on 13 May, according to court records. The defence argued that Stashevsky is being prosecuted solely because of his religious convictions, which violates his Constitutional rights.

Stashevsky complained that he had not been given enough time to review the case against him. Judge Norets rebuked the Prosecutor, Jehovah's Witnesses noted. Several further trial hearings were held over the following months.

At the 30 June hearing, two former members of the registered Jehovah's Witness organisation in Sevastopol testified that after the Russian Supreme Court declared the Jehovah's Witness organisation "extremist" and banned its activity in 2017, the Sevastopol organisation ceased to exist.

They said that neither Stashevsky nor other organisation members conducted any further activity on behalf of the organisation. They pointed out the difference between the organisation's activities – such as handling legal, financial and administrative matters – and individuals' activity of reading the Bible, praying and singing.

The defence complained that they were unable to question the prosecution "witnesses", the secret witness "Vasilisa Ivanova", and D. Korkushko, who had allegedly attended the community before its liquidation in 2017.

However, Judge Norets then resigned from the Court, and Stashevsky's trial was handed to a new Judge, Pavel Kryllo. On 19 October, the trial began again from the start, with the Prosecutor presenting the case again and the judge questioning the prosecution witness, FSB officer Dmitry Shevchenko. The court accepted documents showing that Stashevsky's 85-year-old mother depends on him for her care.

The court held a further hearing on 26 October and is due to resume on the afternoon of 19 November, according to court records.

In April and May 2018, Judge Kryllo of Gagarin District Court fined four longtime residents of Sevastopol (one of them twice), all Ukrainian citizens, to punish them for participating in a Pentecostal worship meeting.

CRIMEA: Ten months in Russian "prison within a prison"

Prisoners of conscience Jehovah's Witnesses Sergei Filatov and Artyom Gerasimov are being denied letters sent to them. Muslim prisoner of conscience Renat Suleimanov is being denied letters sent in his own language of Crimean Tatar. He has been held for ten months in Kamenka Labour Camp's closed zone, in a cell holding 10 prisoners, but may be released in December. All were transferred illegally to jails in Russia.

By Felix Corley

Forum18 (12.11.2020) - <https://bit.ly/2V4x6BN> - One of the three Crimean prisoners of conscience jailed in Russian labour camps for exercising freedom of religion and belief in Crimea is expected to complete his prison term at the end of December, more than three years after his October 2017 arrest. Muslim prisoner of conscience Renat Suleimanov has spent the ten months since January 2020 in the closed zone ("strict detention conditions") of Kamenka Labour Camp in Russia's Kabardino-Balkariya Republic.

"If the labour camp has about 1,000 prisoners, the closed zone has about 10, and they are held all in one cell," relatives of Suleimanov told Forum 18. "It's like a prison within a prison." A labour camp official would not explain why Suleimanov is held in the closed zone (see below).

Visits from relatives and friends is made difficult by the Russian authorities having moved Suleimanov so far from his home, against the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (known as the Mandela Rules – A/C.3/70/L.3) (see below).

Letters from relatives have been handed on after being censored, but only if they are in Russian. Letters in the Crimean Tatar language are not given to Suleimanov, but he does have access to a copy of the Koran and can pray openly (see below).

One of the two cases Suleimanov's lawyer lodged to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg is about the illegal transfer to a Russian prison (see below).

Even once he completes his prison term, Suleimanov will have to live under restrictions for another year, while his bank accounts will remain blocked for many more years (see below).

"It is difficult for Renat's mother, who is in her eighties," one of Suleimanov's relatives told Forum 18. "She survived the deportation of all the Crimean Tatars [in 1944] and then to have this at the end of her life." She last met her son in a meeting in the Investigator's office in the Crimean capital Simferopol in summer 2018 (see below).

The two other Crimean prisoners of conscience sentenced to punish their exercise of freedom of religion and belief - Jehovah's Witnesses Sergei Filatov and Artyom Gerasimov - were transferred from Crimea to a prison in Russia in summer 2020. Both are now in Labour Camp No. 12 in Kamensk-Shakhtinsky in Russia's Rostov Region,

which is over 560 kms (350 miles) from their homes, making visits from relatives and friends difficult. Neither are in the closed zone (see below).

As of 30 September, neither Gerasimov nor Filatov had been given any of the many letters Jehovah's Witnesses say were sent to him, against the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (known as the Mandela Rules – A/C.3/70/L.3). Prison authorities have refused to explain why they do this (see below).

Prisoner of conscience Gerasimov states that he is required to work six days a week in the sewing workshop, mainly making rubberised suits and masks. Prisoner of conscience Filatov works six days a week in the carpentry workshop, making carved pieces for backgammon sets, for which he receives about 100 Roubles (12 Norwegian Kroner, 1.1 Euros or 1.3 US Dollars) a month. This is about the price of a cup of coffee in a local cafe (see below).

The camp administration seized Gerasimov's Bible when he arrived. But he was later able to get a copy of the nineteenth-century Synodal translation of the Bible, which is widely used by Russian Orthodox, Protestants and others (see below).

The FSB security service continues to question associates of Gerasimov in Crimea, insisting that they "keep in touch". In one case, the FSB spent half an hour questioning one acquaintance, asking if any friends and relatives of the acquaintance are Jehovah's Witnesses and asking about Gerasimov (see below).

Meanwhile, the criminal trial of another Crimean Jehovah's Witness Viktor Stashevsky on "extremism"-related charges began again in the port city of Sevastopol on 19 October. And four more Jehovah's Witnesses were arrested in Sevastopol on 1 October after raids on nine homes, and ordered held in Investigation Prison in Simferopol until late November.

Three sentences, three illegal transfers

Crimean Muslim prisoner of conscience Renat Rustemovich Suleimanov (born 30 August 1969) is serving his sentence in Russia's Kamenka Labour Camp. The Russian FSB security service arrested him in October 2017. In January 2019 a Simferopol court jailed him for four years on "extremism"-related charges for meeting openly in mosques with three friends to discuss their faith.

In May 2019, the prison authorities transferred prisoner of conscience Suleimanov to Kamenka Labour Camp (over 1,000 kms or 800 miles from his home) in Russia's Kabardino-Balkariya Region.

The Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War covers the rights of civilians in territories occupied by another state (described as "protected persons"). Article 76 includes the provision: "Protected persons accused of offences shall be detained in the occupied country, and if convicted they shall serve their sentences therein."

Russia's March 2014 annexation of Crimea is not recognised by Ukraine or internationally.

Also, Rule 59 of the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (known as the Mandela Rules – A/C.3/70/L.3) states: "Prisoners shall be allocated, to the extent possible, to prisons close to their homes or their places of social rehabilitation."

Prisoner of conscience Suleimanov lodged a second case to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg on 18 November 2019 (Application No. 64404/19), complaining that his transfer from Ukraine (occupied Crimea) to a prison in Russia was illegal under Article 3 Protocol 4 of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms and of inhumane treatment in prison (Article 3).

The second imprisonment for exercising freedom of religion and belief was of Jehovah's Witness Sergei Viktorovich Filatov (born 6 June 1972), a married father of four from Dzhankoi. On 5 March 2020, Dzhankoi District Court jailed him for six years, with five years' additional restrictions, to punish him for meeting with family and friends to discuss religious themes. On 26 May, Crimea's Supreme Court rejected his appeal and upheld the sentence.

The third such jailing was of Jehovah's Witness Artyom Vyacheslavovich Gerasimov (born 13 January 1985) from Yalta. On 4 June, Crimea's Supreme Court changed his punishment from a fine of two years' average wages to a six-year jail term. Yalta City Court had imposed the fine on 5 March to punish him for meeting with others to discuss the Bible.

On 8 June prisoner of conscience Filatov was transferred from Crimea to Russia to serve his prison term, and in July prisoner of conscience Gerasimov was transferred to Russia to serve his prison term.

Both Filatov and Gerasimov are now in Labour Camp No. 12 in Kamensk-Shakhtinsky in Russia's Rostov Region. This is over 560 kms (350 miles) from Filatov and Gerasimov's homes, making visits from relatives and friends difficult.

The FSB security service continues to question associates of Gerasimov in Crimea, Jehovah's Witnesses note, insisting that they "keep in touch". In one case, they spent half an hour questioning one acquaintance, asking if any friends and relatives are Jehovah's Witnesses and asking about Gerasimov.

Prisoner of conscience Suleimanov: labour camp punishment cell to closed zone

In early July 2019, immediately after two weeks' quarantine, Kamenka Labour Camp authorities put prisoner of conscience Suleimanov into a punishment cell for an alleged conflict with another prisoner which his lawyer insists was fabricated.

Since Suleimanov in January 2020 completed six months in a punishment cell, he has been held in Kamenka Labour Camp's closed zone. "If the labour camp has about 1,000 prisoners, the closed zone has about 10, and they are held all in one cell," his relative told Forum 18 on 11 November. "It's like a prison within a prison."

The relative thought that Suleimanov was put in the closed zone "because of the [Criminal Code] Article [he was sentenced under]. All Crimean Tatar prisoners are held like that."

An official of Kamenka Labour Camp's Special Department refused to explain why prisoner of conscience Suleimanov was put in the closed zone, responding "because he was sentenced". Asked again, she replied: "Because he behaves like that." Asked how Suleimanov behaves, she responded: "He behaves well." She then refused to explain her statements and put the phone down.

While in the punishment cell, prisoner of conscience Suleimanov was not allowed either visits or letters. Visits from relatives and friends are made difficult by the Russian

authorities having moved Suleimanov so far from his home. (Kamenka Labour Camp is over 1,000 km or 800 miles away.)

Suleimanov's mother is in her eighties and she last met her son in a meeting in the Investigator's office in Simferopol in the Crimean peninsula in summer 2018.

Letters from relatives have been handed on if they are in Russian, one of prisoner of conscience Suleimanov's relatives told Forum 18, "but they open them first – of course there is censorship". Suleimanov and his family would like to correspond in the Crimean Tatar language which they also write (and which the Mandela Rules support), the relative added.

The relative said that Suleimanov has access to a copy of the Koran and can pray openly. "There are a lot of Muslims in this part of Russia and many of the prisoners he is with are Muslims. They don't ban them from praying."

Suleimanov's address in Kamenka Labour Camp is:

361424 Kabardino-Balkariya
Chegemsky raion
Pos. Kamenka
Ul. D.A. Mizieva 1
FKU Ispravitel'naya koloniya No. 1 UFSIN Rossii po Kabardino-Balkarskoi Respubliki
Suleimanovu Renatu Rustemovichu

Prisoners of conscience Gerasimov and Filatov in same labour camp

On 27 July 2020, prisoner of conscience Gerasimov arrived at Investigation Prison No. 1 in Krasnodar in southern European Russia on the way to a labour camp. He was placed in a cell designed for 10 prisoners, but which had 15 when he and four other prisoners were placed there, Jehovah's Witnesses stated. Gerasimov and the other four extra prisoners could not sleep on the first night, after which only 10 prisoners remained in the cell.

In August, the prison authorities transferred prisoner of conscience Gerasimov to Labour Camp No. 12 in Kamensk-Shakhtinsky in Russia's Rostov Region.

On 16 August his lawyer was allowed to visit Gerasimov, and learned that the camp administration had handed over none of the many letters Jehovah's Witnesses say were sent to him. As of 30 September, letters had still not been handed to him. This is against the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (known as the Mandela Rules – A/C.3/70/L.3).

Labour Camp No. 12 is over 560 kms (350 miles) from Filatov and Gerasimov's homes, making visits from relatives and friends difficult.

Prisoner of conscience Gerasimov states that he is required to work six days a week in the sewing workshop, mainly making rubberised suits and masks.

The camp administration seized Gerasimov's Bible when he arrived. But he was later able to get a copy of the nineteenth-century Synodal translation of the Bible, which is widely used by Russian Orthodox, Protestants and others.

The United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (known as the Mandela Rules – A/C.3/70/L.3) require governments to respect the freedom of religion and belief and other human rights of prisoners. This includes access to religious texts and the freedom to pray individually and to meet for worship with others.

Prisoner of conscience Filatov was first sent to Investigation Prison No. 5 in Rostov-on-Don, where he suffered from bronchial disease, Jehovah's Witnesses stated, before being sent to Labour Camp No. 12 in Kamensk-Shakhtinsky. This is the same camp where Gerasimov is being held.

Filatov has worked six days a week in the carpentry workshop, making carved pieces for backgammon sets, for which he receives about 100 Roubles (12 Norwegian Kroner, 1.1 Euros or 1.3 US Dollars) a month. This is about the price of a cup of coffee in a local cafe.

The camp authorities in Kamensk-Shakhtinsky – like the prison authorities in Simferopol – were refusing as of 30 September to hand over the many letters that had arrived for Filatov, Jehovah's Witnesses complain. This is against the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (known as the Mandela Rules – A/C.3/70/L.3). Labour camp staff ask him who he is and why so many letters arrive for him.

The lawyer for Gerasimov and Filatov asked the labour camp leadership about its refusal to hand over letters. "There was a promise to look into this," Jehovah's Witnesses told Forum 18. "It remains unclear what the situation is now."

On 11 November, the duty officer at the Kamensk-Shakhtinsky camp said he was unable to put Forum 18 through to the head, Colonel Sergei Krikunov. He referred all enquiries to the camp's Special Department, but its telephone went unanswered each time Forum 18 called on 11 and 12 November.

Gerasimov and Filatov's address in Labour Camp No. 12 is:

347803 Rostov-on-Don Region
g. Kamensk-Shakhtinsky
Ul. Morskaya 94
FKU Ispravitel'naya koloniya No. 12 UFSIN Rossii po Rostovskoy oblasti
Gerasimov, Artyom Vyacheslavovich
Filatov, Sergei Viktorovich

Ombudsperson "can't check the validity of judicial decisions"

Asked why the three prisoners of conscience were transferred from the Russian-occupied territory of Crimea to prisons in Russia, an aide to Larisa Opanasyuk, the Russian government's human rights Ombudsperson for Crimea, told Forum 18 from the regional capital Simferopol on 11 November: "We're not occupied territory."

Asked why Suleimanov, Filatov and Gerasimov were jailed for exercising their freedom of religion and belief, Opanasyuk's aide – who would not give her name – took the details of their cases. "We must check this, we need to see if the information you have is accurate. But we can't check the validity of judicial decisions." She then put the phone down.

Prisoner of conscience Suleimanov to complete prison term soon?

Counting the time Muslim prisoner of conscience Suleimanov was held in pre-trial detention from October 2017, his four year jail term from January 2019 is due to end in late December 2020, a relative told Forum 18. However, officials have not said exactly when that will be.

An official of the Special Department of Kamenka Labour Camp in Russia's Kabardino-Balkaria Republic, who would not give her name, refused to say when Suleimanov is due to complete his prison term. "We have no right to give you any information," she told Forum 18 on 11 November.

July 2018 amendments to Russian Criminal Code Article 72 stipulate that one day in pre-trial detention counts as one and half days in a general-regime labour camp ("correctional colony") after sentencing. The amendments had retroactive effect.

"But the Federal Penitentiary Service calculates the reduction, and it is not clear how they calculate it," his lawyer Roman Martynovskyy told Forum 18 from the Ukrainian capital Kiev on 10 November. "We're not sure how the time spent in transfer from the Investigation Prison to the labour camp is reckoned."

Suleimanov: Restrictions after release

After he completes his jail term, Suleimanov is expecting to return to his home on the outskirts of Simferopol, where he lives with his wife and three teenage daughters.

Even once he completes his jail term, Suleimanov will live under restrictions for a further year. "He will not be able to change his place of residence without permission, will not be able to leave his home town or village, and will have to report to the authorities twice a month," his lawyer Martynovskyy told Forum 18.

Suleimanov's bank accounts will continue to be blocked. He was added in April 2019 to the Russian Federal Financial Monitoring Service (Rosfinmonitoring) "List of Terrorists and Extremists", whose accounts banks are obliged to freeze, apart from small transactions.

"It is difficult for Renat's mother, who is in her eighties," Suleimanov's relative told Forum 18. "She survived the deportation of all the Crimean Tatars [in 1944] and then to have this at the end of her life."

Falun Gong banned for 'religious extremism' in Russia

Human Rights Without Frontiers considers the ban a grave violation of religious freedom

HRWF (12.11.2020) - On 10 November, Interfax-Religion, the press agency of the Russian Orthodox Church, announced in a [press release](#):

"A court in the Russian city of Novosibirsk has designated the regional branch of the Chinese sect *Falun Gong*, also known as *Falun Dafa*, an extremist organization in Russia.

The Khakassia regional organization for spiritual and physical self-improvement in accordance with the Great Law *Falun Dafa* has been designated as an extremist organization and its activities in the territory of the Russian Federation have been banned, Novosibirsk's Fifth General Court of Appeal said in a ruling handed down at its session on Tuesday.

In July, the Supreme Court of Russia's internal republic of Khakassia refused to recognize *Falun Gong* as an extremist organization. A deputy prosecutor general of Khakassia appealed the decision, and it was later repealed."

And Interfax enumerated a number of problems faced by followers of *Falun* in recent years in their activities throughout Russia:

“In December 2010, a *Falun Gong* exhibition was banned in Elista. In June 2015, officers of law enforcement thwarted the activity of the leader of the sect's cell in Izhevsk. In July 2020, six U.S. and one British non-governmental organization related to *Falun Gong* were recognized as unwelcome in Russia.”

Between 2014 and 2019, one of the movement's members was fined and another one was jailed for three days for distributing a book containing the movement's teachings. The two cases were used by prosecutors to file a request to classify the group as extremist.

The movement considers the ban is a fabricated case and will appeal the ruling.

Anti-cult propaganda

In its press release, Interfax quoted a controversial professor in religious studies, Roman Silantsev, who is a staff member of the [Moscow Patriarchate](#) Department for External Church Relations and professor at the University of Moscow:

“Prof. Silantsev called the decision to ban *Falun Gong* an important milestone in combating extremism. ‘Currently, this is the world's largest sect. It has been active in Russia as well, and not only in Khakassia. I hope that starting from this moment, it will be possible to ban it throughout the territory of our country, as happened with the Jehovah's Witnesses. This is an occult totalitarian sect based on an interest in qigong. Its founder was able to turn a rather mild practice into rituals dangerous to both the sect's members and the people around them,’” Silantsev told *Interfax*.”

In 2005 Silantsev was relieved from his IIRC (Interreligious Council of Russia) posts after the controversial reception of his book *A Modern History of the Islamic Community in Russia*, criticized both from the [Muslim](#) and [Orthodox](#) sides.

Along with the notorious anti-cultist activist, Alexander Dvorkin, Prof. Silantsev is known to fuel hate speech against non-Orthodox religious movements.

Human Rights Without Frontiers considers his comments as such and the ban on Falun Gong a violation of religious freedom.

Seven foreign pro-Falun Gong movements declared undesirable in Russia

In July 2020, seven foreign organizations supporting the followers of Chinese religious doctrine Falun Gong or Falun Dafa have been declared undesirable in the Russian Federation, the press service of the Prosecutor General's Office reports.

The organizations added to the so-called undesirable list are America's Global Organization for Falun Gong Prosecution Investigations, Coalition on the Investigation into Prosecution of Falun Gong in China, the World Council for Protection of Prosecuted Falun Gong adepts, Friends of Falun Gong, British Falun Dafa and others, the statement reads.

Activities of these organizations create a hazard to the safety of the Russian Federation, the Prosecutor General's Office stated.

Information on the decision has been forwarded to the Justice Ministry to add it to the list of international NGOs declared undesirable in Russia, according to prosecutors.

Falun Gong or Falun Dafa is a religious movement founded by its leader Li Hongzhi in China in the early 1990s. After the movement had been banned several its leaders received long prison terms for organizing illegal mass events, infliction of harm to life and health of the doctrine's followers and espionage. Certain Falun Dafa information materials have been declared extremist in Russia.

What is Falung Gong?

In its report ["In Prison For Their Faith 2020"](#) recently published, *Human Rights Without Frontiers* wrote:

"The Falun Gong movement (or *Falun Dafa*) began in 1992 in northeast China where Master Li Hongzhi taught about the healing and health benefits of the ancient Chinese practice of Qigong.¹ When he first developed the practice of Falun Gong, he was a government-registered teacher of Qigong. Li drew from the teachings of classical religious traditions – Taoism and Buddhism in particular – to construct a system of beliefs and practices that focus on the cultivation of compassion and virtue in pursuit of human wholeness. He incorporated much of that teaching in his own work and emphasised moral values and the development of character. He focused on three tenets: truthfulness, compassion and forbearance.

In the 1990s, Li travelled across China, giving classes in Falun Gong to audiences ranging from a few hundred to several thousand. Li's first book appeared in 1993 and his first teaching video was released in 1994. His reputation spread with astonishing speed. By 1999, the government estimated the number of Falun Gong practitioners at 70 million.

At that time, Falun Gong was not politically controversial. However, China, as a totalitarian state, considers any unofficial and unauthorised organisation to be a threat to the one-party state. With Falun Gong's commitment to truthfulness, perhaps it would begin denouncing the rampant corruption across the country. Such thoughts triggered Beijing to start a propaganda campaign against Falun Gong in 1999. It shut off Internet access for websites that mentioned Falun Gong and denounced Falun Gong as a 'heretical organisation' and a menace to social stability.

When those initial measures failed to stunt the movement, the government imprisoned hundreds of thousands of practitioners, subjecting them to forced labour and sometimes torture.

By the late 1990s, Li's movement had spread to most Chinese cities and overseas to centres in Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan, and the United States (US). Li Hongzhi left China in 1995 to give lectures to large crowds in several major cities around the world. In 1996, he settled in the US where the Falun Gong movement has established a global media presence from New York City through its newspaper, website *Epoch Times*, and television station *New Tang Dynasty*.

As there are no formalised membership records maintained by Falun Gong, only rough estimates are available for the numbers of practitioners worldwide. At the peak of its popularity in China, there were an estimated 70 million adherents. Today, some sources

¹ "Falun Gong," World Religious Spirituality, accessed June 2020.

<https://wrludreels.org/2012/04/04/fallun-gong2/>.

estimate that tens of millions continue to practice Falun Gong in China despite experiencing harsh persecution.

Hundreds of thousands are estimated to practice Falun Gong outside of China in over 70 countries worldwide. Li often lectures at conferences of Falun Gong Experience Sharing. In May 2017, he led a conference in Brooklyn, New York, US that was attended by 10,000 practitioners from 58 countries.

Further reading

Bitter Winter: Falun Gong banned in Khakassia, "Liquidation" threatened in the whole of Russia <https://bitterwinter.org/falun-gong-banned-in-khakassia/>

Radio Free Europe/ Radio Liberty: A Siberian court orders Falun Gong movement banned <https://bit.ly/2UkrQd5>

44 Jehovah's Witnesses in prison for their faith, according to report by HRWF

HRWF (11.11.2020) – Many Jehovah's Witnesses are behind bars in Russia for the peaceful exercise of their religious freedom according to a [report](#) published by *Human Rights Without Frontiers* (HRWF)².

The report exposes the reasons behind this persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses, analyses data, explains the articles of the Penal Code misused to convict them, and provides a few examples of advocacy by the US Department of State, the European Union and Jehovah's Witnesses' lawyers.

The last update of [HRWF's Database of Jehovah's Witnesses in prison](#) in Russia dated 10 November comprises of 44 documented individual cases, a statistic confirmed by [JW.ORG](#).

The Reasons for the Persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia

As of 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.³ According to the international headquarters of the Jehovah's Witnesses, their movement in Russia, which was legalised in 1991, is comprised of 395 local branches and 175,000 members.⁴

In April 2017, the Russian Supreme Court banned all Jehovah's Witnesses organisations in Russia and confiscated all their properties. It declared the Jehovah's Witnesses Administrative Centre, the head office for all 395 branches, an extremist organisation and ruled that all branches must be shut down.

² The report "[In Prison For Their Faith 2020](#)" covers five countries where there are Jehovah's Witnesses in prison: Eritrea, Russia, Singapore, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan (<https://bit.ly/3knfFqi>).

³ 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/>

⁴ "Russia/ Special Report: State-sponsored persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses continues", 22 March 2019, *Jehovah's Witnesses.org*, accessed May 2020. <https://www.jw.org/en/news/legal/by-region/russia/special-report-20190322/>

This ruling was the last stage of an increasingly repressive policy starting in the early 2000s when the National Security Concept was extended to the spiritual realm.

The spiritual security concept is closely associated with the persisting Soviet paranoia of 'foreign' enemies and 'foreign' ideas. On 20 July 2012, President Vladimir Putin signed the so-called 'foreign agent law' that requires non-profit organisations that receive foreign funding and allegedly engage in 'political activity' to register and declare themselves as 'foreign agents'. Russian human rights NGOs fell into that category and so were forced to stigmatise themselves publicly. The concept of a 'foreign agent' quickly extended to religious organisations of foreign origin. Concretely, this spiritual security concept resulted in a religious cleansing policy that targets movements perceived as a threat to the identity of the Russian people and the Slavic and Orthodox Christian values. The door was opened to a sacred and natural alliance between the Kremlin and the Russian Orthodox Church, the main beneficiary of President Putin's spiritual security policy.

Simultaneously, the criminalisation of violent extremism progressively evolved until it included a vague concept of extremism without violence. This was condemned by the United Nations, the Council of Europe and its Venice Commission, the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and other transnational institutions. Proselytism became 'propaganda of exclusivity, superiority or inferiority of a person on the basis of their religious affiliation or attitude toward religion', and an alleged form of extremist activity. As a result, any discourse or debate on spiritual topics, whether this concerns critiquing or considering the merits of a religion, could be characterised as extremist activity.

Anti-extremist measures include the prohibition of materials (books, videos, websites) on the grounds that they promote the superiority of one religion over others. This prohibition may be penalised with fines for believers and organisations for distribution of (or even possession 'with intent to distribute') prohibited materials under the Code of Administrative Offences. Believers may be prosecuted for inciting religious hatred, followed by a warning to the religious organisation about the impermissibility of extremist activities. Furthermore, a religious organisation may be subject to liquidation and prohibition for extremism, and its believers prosecuted for continuing the activities of the banned organisation.

The Russian Orthodox Church, the Catholic Church and other mainstream religions that have been part of Russia's history such as Islam, Judaism and Buddhism are not targeted by the spiritual security concept and the anti-extremism laws. New and dissenting religious movements that are not controlled by these established religions are the victims of this legislation, especially Jehovah's Witnesses.

Jehovah's Witnesses in Prison in Russia

Jehovah's Witnesses represent the highest number of religious prisoners in Russia. Their movement is banned and so are their publications. They are arrested and convicted as extremists for leading religious meetings in private houses as well as for possessing and distributing the publications of their movement.

Jehovah's Witnesses behind bars: some statistics

As of 1 June 2020, HRWF documented **34 cases** of Jehovah's Witnesses in its Prisoners' Database.⁵ However, in total there were 93 people on trial on charges of 'continuing the

⁵ Our Database is updated on a regular basis. For more details about imprisoned Jehovah's Witnesses, see <https://hrwf.eu/prisoners-database/>.

activities of a banned extremist organisation' because they had exercised their right to freedom of religion and belief. At least 20 of the 93 individuals on trial were above the age of 60. Investigators had also blocked more than 200 Jehovah's Witnesses' bank accounts.⁶

In their 2019 annual report, the Jehovah's Witnesses reported that over the course of that year 313 members had been charged, put on trial, or convicted for involvement in the group, and that Russian authorities had conducted 489 raids on the private homes of their members.⁷

Articles of the penal code

The two main articles in the Russian criminal code used by the judiciary to sentence Jehovah's Witnesses are:

Article 282.2: 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'.

Article 282.3, Part 1: Financing of extremist activity. Offences under this article incur large fines or prison terms of up to eight years.⁸

International advocacy

In September 2019, the **US Department of State** banned two high-ranking regional officers in Russia's Investigative Committee from entering the US because they had allegedly tortured seven Jehovah's Witnesses. They were Vladimir Petrovich Yermolayev, the Head of the Investigative Committee in the city of Surgut, and Stepan Vladimirovich Tkach, Senior Investigator at the Investigative Committee of Surgut.

The US Department of State had credible information that Yermolayev and Tkach were involved in torture and/or cruel, inhumane, or degrading treatment or punishment of Jehovah's Witnesses in Surgut, Russia. On 15 February 2019, officers of the Surgut Investigative Committee, led by Yermolayev and Tkach, subjected at least seven Jehovah's Witnesses to suffocation, electric shocks, and severe beatings during interrogation.⁹

On 12 March 2020, the **European Union** issued a *Statement on the situation of Jehovah's Witnesses in the Russian Federation and allegations of torture and ill-treatment* at the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Permanent Council in Vienna.¹⁰

⁶ Arnold, Victoria, "RUSSIA: UN Working Group Condemns Detentions. Trial List," Forum18: RUSSIA: UN Working Group condemns detentions, Trial list - 21 May 2020, May 21, 2020. http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2573.

⁷ "Свидетели Иеговы Под Гнетом Репрессий. Итоги 2019 Года," Новости - Свидетели Иеговы в России, accessed June, 2020 (Jehovah's Witnesses Under the Yoke of Repression: Results of 2019). <https://jw-russia.org/news/2019/12/1512.html>.

⁸ "On trial, despite age and sickness", *Forum 18*, 18 May 2020, accessed 6 July 2020. http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2571

⁹ 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/>

¹⁰ OSCE Permanent Council No. 1262, EU Statement on the situation of Jehovah's Witnesses in the Russian Federation and allegations of torture and ill-treatment (PC.DEL/325/20), March 13, 2020. <https://www.stjornarradid.is/lisalib/getfile.aspx?itemid=03513350-683c-11ea-9456-005056bc530c>.

On 1 May 2020, the **UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention** adopted an Opinion (A/HRC/WGAD/2020/10) condemning the raids, arrests, detention and trials of 18 Jehovah's Witnesses, stating that it 'wishes to emphasize that none of them should have been arrested and held in pre-trial detention and no trial of any of them should take or should have taken place'.¹¹

Attorneys for imprisoned Jehovah's Witnesses have also submitted complaints to the **UN Human Rights Committee**.¹²

Finally, Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia have filed 57 applications with the **European Court of Human Rights**. Thus far their efforts to end these unjust imprisonments have been unsuccessful.¹³

Over 400 Jehovah's Witnesses charged or convicted in Russia, group says

The Moscow Times (10.11.2020) - <https://bit.ly/35oyANr> - More than 400 Jehovah's Witnesses have been charged or convicted in Russia since the country banned the religious group as an "extremist" organization three years ago, the Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia has said.

Since the April 2017 ban by Russia's Supreme Court, law enforcement officers raided the homes of 1,166 worshippers' families, the Jehovah's Witnesses said.

Authorities have opened 175 criminal cases into "extremism" against worshippers as of late October 2020, with 148 of them still in progress, the Christian denomination said on its website.

More than half of the 400 worshippers spent between several days to three years in detention while awaiting trial. Some 310 have lost their jobs, businesses, pensions and bank accounts as a result of the "extremist" label.

Four Jehovah's Witnesses have died while under investigation.

Ten worshippers are serving prison sentences ranging from two to six years, with two others waiting for their two-year prison sentence to enter into force. Among them, Danish citizen Dennis Christensen has remained behind bars the longest following his detention in May 2017. A court in central Russia convicted him almost two years later.

According to the Jehovah's Witnesses website, 64 of its members are either in pre-trial detention or under house arrest while 224 are either banned from certain activities or from leaving Russia.

"The increase in the number of victims of religious persecution is bewildering amidst repeated statements by the authorities that the April 2017 Supreme Court decision did

¹¹ Arnold, Victoria, "RUSSIA: UN Working Group Condemns Detentions. Trial List," Forum 18: RUSSIA: UN Working Group condemns detentions, Trial list - 21 May 2020, May 21, 2020. http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2573.

¹² "Imprisoned for Their Faith: Russia", *Jehovah's Witnesses.org*, accessed May 2020. <https://www.jw.org/en/news/legal/by-region/russia/jehovahs-witnesses-in-prison/>.

¹³ "Imprisoned for Their Faith: Russia", *Jehovah's Witnesses.org*, accessed May 2020. <https://www.jw.org/en/news/legal/by-region/russia/jehovahs-witnesses-in-prison/>.

not prohibit the Jehovah's Witnesses from practicing their religion in Russia," the organization said.

President Vladimir Putin's human rights commissioner has suggested that Russia's extremism legislation was in "conflict" with the country's constitutional right to practice any religion.

Human Rights Watch has called on the Russian authorities to immediately release the detained Jehovah's Witnesses, drop outstanding charges and expunge all related criminal records.

Special bimonthly FORB Digest (16.10-01.11.2020)

29.10.20 - Four Jehovah's Witnesses fail to erase criminal record

Link to full text in Russian: <https://www.zaprava.ru/bryanskij-sud-podtverdil-obvinitelnyj-prigovor-4-svidetelyam-iegovy-iz-novozybkova/>

On 28 October, the Bryansk oblast court reviewing an appellate complaint against the sentence of four Jehovah's Witnesses (an organization considered extremist in the R.F.) from Novozybkov left it in force. As reported on the website of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia, Vladimir Khokhlov, Eduard Zhinzhikov, Tatiana Shamsheva, and Olga Silaeva remain at liberty because they had already served the time imposed on them in the pretrial investigation cell (SIZO).

[Continue reading...](#)

28.10.20 - Appeals court rebuffs Jehovah's Witnesses

Link to full text in Russian: <https://sarinform.ru/news/2020/10/28/225319>

The Dimitrovgrad city court of Ulianovsk oblast refused a member of the Saratov congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses (ruled to be extremist and its activity banned on Russian territory), Konstantin Bazhenov, his petition to substitute a milder punishment for his unserved time in a penal colony. This was reported by the press service of the court.

[Continue reading...](#)

27.10.20 - St. Petersburg authorities try to halt Jehovah's Witnesses' internet activity

Link to full text in Russian: http://rapsinews.ru/judicial_news/20201027/306440833.html

A court will consider on 14 December a lawsuit of the prosecutor's office of St. Petersburg against Roskomnadzor to find to be extremist a mobile phone application, "JW Library," which was created by the Jehovah's Witnesses and distributed through the application stores Google Play and App Store, RAPSI was told at the Joint Press Service of courts of St. Petersburg.

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26.10.20 - Dennis Christensen again denied early release

Link to full text in Russian: <https://credo.press/233650/>

On 26 October, the Lgov district court of Kursk oblast refused to substitute a fine for the unserved portion of his prison term for the Dane Dennis Christensen. The court cited Christensen's unwillingness to work in prison production, although such labor is contraindicated for him because of the condition of his health, a correspondent for the portal Credo.Press reports, referring to a source among Russian Jehovah's Witnesses.

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23.10.20 - Sect leader held in notorious Moscow psychiatric clinic

Link to full text in Russian: <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=75962>

Lawyers for the defendants in the case of the "Church of the Last Testament" report that the head of the community, Sergei Torop (Vissarion), was transferred to the Serbsky Institute.

Continue reading...

23.10.20 - A Kirov court finds Anatoliy Tokarev, a peaceful believer, guilty of extremism.

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2020/10/12.html>

On October 23, 2020, the Oktyabrsky District Court of Kirov announced the verdict in the case of 61-year-old Anatoliy Tokarev, one of Jehovah's Witnesses. He was found guilty of organizing the activities of the banned organization and fined 500 thousand rubles.

Continue reading...

23.10.20 - Law enforcement officials conduct another raid against believers in Russia's Far East.

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2020/10/11.html>

On October 22, 2020, searches were conducted in the town of Sovetskaya Gavan (Khabarovsk Territory). Aleksey Ukhov, 40, was detained, his electronic devices were taken from him and he was placed into isolator in neighboring settlement Vanino. Details are being clarified.

Continue reading...

21.10.20 - Two believers, who experienced beatings in an Orenburg correctional facility, may be released early.

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2020/10/10.html>

Saratov residents Roman Gridasov and Gennady German, sentenced to 2 years in prison for their faith, served half their sentence. In September, the defense requested their release in exchange for a fine. It is expected that the Central District Court of Orenburg will consider their application in November 2020.

Continue reading...

20.10.20 - Religious rights group "Article28" publicizes violations

Link to full text in Russian:

http://www.sclj.ru/news/detail.phpSECTION_ID=527&ELEMENT_ID=8309

On Sunday, 18 October, at about 5:00 p.m., a group of law enforcers disrupted a religious gathering in the city of Orekhovo-Zuevo, the website of project "Article28" reports [also referred to as "Svoboda28" (Freedom28)--tr.]. According to eyewitness accounts, these were personnel from the prosecutor's office, the police ("E" Center), and the F.S.B.

Continue reading...

20.10.20 - Mormon family loses appeal in European court

Link to full text in Russian: <https://www.ng.ru/news/692955.html>

On 20 October 2020, the European Court of Human Rights (E.C.H.R.) published a decision in the case of the pastor of the "Community of Christ" church [also known as Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints—tr.], Perov v. Russia.

Continue reading...

19.10.20 - Moscow patriarch finalizes excommunication of extremist cleric

Link to full text in Russian: <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=75941>

Patriarch of Moscow and all-Rus Kirill confirmed the decision of the court of the Ekaterinburg diocese concerning expulsion from the church of schema monk Sergius (Nikolai Romanov), the official website of the Russian Orthodox Church reported on Monday evening.

Continue reading...

19.10.20 - The Center for Counteracting Extremism, the FSB and the Investigative Committee conducted a joint raid on believers near Yekaterinburg

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2020/10/9.html>

In the early morning of October 19, 2020, at least 5 searches of the residences of local Jehovah's Witnesses took place in the town of Beryozovsky near Ekaterinburg. The 38-year-old Konstantin Zotov was detained, but after 3 hours of interrogation was released. Details are being clarified.

Continue reading...

16.10.20 - Dissident Orthodox priest taken to court

Link to full text in Russian: <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=75917>

The Kurgan diocese [of the Russian Orthodox Church—tr.] has declared that news reports about holding one of its parishes accountable for illegal missionary activity do not correspond to reality, inasmuch as they refer to a parish of a schismatic.

[Continue reading...](#)

Persecution against religious organizations and believers in September, monitoring by Sova Center

HRWF (27.10.2020) – Every month, Sova Center publishes an update of the persecution of believers of all faiths in Russia.

Muslims

In September, the Southern District Military Court in Rostov-on-Don sentenced eight alleged members of the banned Islamic radical party Hizb ut-Tahrir. They were charged under Article 205.5 Parts 1 or 2 of the Criminal Code (organizing the activities of a terrorist organization or participating in it) and Article 278 of the Criminal Code in aggregation with Article 30 Part 1 of the Criminal Code (preparations for the forcible seizure of power). The court sentenced Marlen Asanov to 19 years in a penal colony, Memet Belyalov – to 18 years, Timur Ibragimov – to 17 years, Seyran Saliev – to 16 years in a penal colony, Server Mustafaev – to 14 years, Edem Smailov and Server Zekiryayev to 13 years each. Ernes Ametov was acquitted (as far as we know, this was the first acquittal in a Hizb ut-Tahrir case). We oppose the practice of charging Hizb ut-Tahrir supporters under anti-terrorist articles, since the organization does not practice violence, and the charges against them are only brought for their party activities, such as holding meetings, studying and distributing the party literature, and so on. The fact that the party preaches the idea of creating a world Islamic caliphate does not give sufficient grounds for charging its followers with planning a violent takeover of power in Russia.

We learned in September that, back in mid-August, the Volzhsky District Court of Saratov issued a verdict under Article 282.2 of the Criminal Code (organizing or participating in an extremist organization) in the case of a group of six farmers – Radik Galimjanov, Bakhtiar Baykulov, Aydyngali Mindagaliev, Aslan Makhmaliev, Mukhambetzhon Bakhmetov – charged with involvement in the banned Islamic religious movement Tablighi Jamaat. The “cell leader” was reportedly convicted under Article 282.2 Part 1 of the Criminal Code and received three years in a minimum security penal colony with a one-year restriction of freedom. The other five defendants were recognized as members of the cell and sentenced under Article 282.2 Part 2 of the Criminal Code – four to 1 year and four months in a minimum security penal colony with a one-year restriction of freedom, and the fifth one – to a year in a minimum security penal colony with a one-year restriction of freedom. Personalized information about these sentences is not currently available. Tablighi Jamaat was banned in Russia in 2009 – in our opinion, inappropriately. This association is engaged in propaganda of fundamentalist Islam, but

has never been implicated any calls for violence; therefore we view the persecution against its supporters as unjustified.

The Sibay Town Court in Bashkortostan fined Damir Kuvandykov in August and Yulia Arslanova in September one thousand rubles each under Article 20.29 of the Code of Administrative Offenses (mass distribution of extremist materials). The prosecutor's office also issued a warning to Arslanova about the impermissibility of violating anti-extremist legislation. Kuvandykov gave his wife and brother three forbidden Islamic religious books to read; this action should not be qualified as mass distribution of materials. Arslanova was prosecuted for reposting The Book of Monotheism by Muhammad ibn Sulayman at-Tamimi (Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab), recognized as extremist. This book contains certain elements of hate speech and a number of positive references to jihad, but, in our opinion, modern standards cannot be applied to 18th century religious works. Therefore we consider the ban against this work inappropriate and believe that people should not be prosecuted for its dissemination.

Jehovah's Witnesses

According to our data, at least five sentences against eleven Jehovah's Witnesses were issued in September for continuing the activities of their communities that have been banned in Russia as extremist organizations. We view this ban and prosecutions for membership in Jehovah's Witnesses communities as inappropriate.

- The Berezovsky Town Court of the Kemerovo Region delivered a verdict in the case of Sergei Britvin and Vadim Levchuk in early September. They were sentenced to four years in prison in a minimum security penal colony with a three-year ban on holding certain posts and a year of restriction of freedom under Article 282.2 Part 1 of the Criminal Code (organizing the activities of an extremist organization). Britvin and Levchuk were accused of organizing prayer meetings of the banned community in the town of Berezovsky. Both pleaded not guilty and intend to appeal the verdict.
- The Novozybkov Town Court of the Bryansk Region issued a guilty verdict in the case of four believers. Vladimir Khokhlov and Eduard Zhinzhikov, charged under Article 282.2 Part 1 and Article 282.3 Part 1 (financing extremist activities) of the Criminal Code, received a year and three months of imprisonment with additional punishments in the form of one year of restriction of freedom and a three-year ban on holding leadership positions. Tatiana Shamsheva and Olga Silaeva, charged with participating in the activities of an extremist organization (Article 282.2 Part 2 of the Criminal Code), were sentenced to a year of imprisonment, six months of restriction of freedom and a two-year ban on holding leadership positions. All four were released from their prison sentences, since they had spent a long time under arrest during the investigation.
- The Berezovsky Town Court of the Kemerovo Region found Khasan Kogut guilty under Article 282.2 Part 2 of the Criminal Code and issued a suspended sentence of two and a half years with a two-year probationary period.
- In Rostov-on-Don, a court found a 58-year-old follower of Jehovah's Witnesses guilty under Article 282.2 Part 2 and Article 132 Part 3 Paragraph "c" (committing violent actions of a sexual character against a person under the age of fourteen) of the Criminal Code and sentenced him to eleven years in a maximum-security penal colony with a one-year restriction of freedom. According to the Investigative Committee, the man was both guilty of preaching and participating in religious meetings of a banned community and "repeatedly committed sexual assault against his three young daughters and their female friend from 2006 to 2008."
- Yelizovsky District Court of the Kamchatka Territory issued a verdict under Article 282.2 Part 2 of the Criminal Code against Konstantin Bazhenov, his wife Snezhana Bazhenova and Vera Zolotova. Each of them received a two-year suspended

sentence with a three-year probationary period and an additional six-month restriction of freedom.

In late August, an investigator of the FSB Directorate for the Sakhalin Region terminated the criminal case against Vyacheslav Ivanov and Dmitry Kulakov from Nevelsk – suspects under Article 282.2 Part 2. The investigator concluded that their actions were “of a general religious nature, connected with the right to practice religion not prohibited in the Russian Federation, which is guaranteed by Article 28 of the Constitution of the Russian Federation.” However, Ivanov remains a defendant in another criminal case initiated under the same article.

The Penza Regional Court commuted in its appellate capacity the sentence of Vladimir Alushkin, a follower of Jehovah's Witnesses previously convicted under of Article 282.2 Part 1 of the Criminal Code, replacing his six-year prison term with a four-year suspended sentence in September. The verdict against five other believers, also charged in this case, was upheld by the court.

The Pervorechensky District Court of Vladivostok returned the case of Elena Barmakina, charged under Article 282.2 Part 2 of the Criminal Code, to the prosecutor, noting that the text of the indictment failed to clarify how Barmakina's exercise of her constitutional right to freedom of religion violated the prohibitions established by the Criminal Code. At the same time, the court continues to consider the case of Barmakina's husband Dmitry; several believers, who had the status of witnesses in the case, have since become defendants.

In September, we learned about new criminal cases against Jehovah's Witnesses in different regions of Russia.

- A court in Kazan detained Konstantin Sannikov in late August. The charges against him were brought because meetings, which included reading of religious texts, were held at his home.
- In Vladivostok, Igor Lonchakov was charged under Article 282.2 Part 1 and Ekaterina Treguba – under Article 282.2 Part 2 of the Criminal Code.
- In Blagoveshchensk, the charge under Article 282.2 Part 2 of the Criminal Code was filed against 57-year-old Adam Svarichevsky and 56-year-old Sergei Afanasyev. They were placed under travel restrictions.

Dennis Christensen again denied early release

HRWF / JW.ORG (27.10.2020) - The [Lgov District Court of the Kursk Region](#) has again denied the early release of Dennis Christensen, who has spent over three years in prison since being arrested on May 25, 2017. He has ten days to appeal. Dennis' original sentence should finish in May 2022. His end date includes a credit for time spent in pretrial detention. However, last month the prison commission labeled him as a “malicious violator” of the facility's protocol. Thus, his pretrial credit is now at risk and he could remain in prison beyond May 2022.

Jarrold Lopes, spokesman for Jehovah's Witnesses, states: “This is very sad news for Dennis, his wife, Irina, and the millions around the world who have been closely following his three-year legal battle. Dennis has been applying for early release since October 2019. The prison administration has persisted in sabotaging Dennis' parole applications by falsely accusing him of misconduct. It is inconceivable the way the court, the prosecutor's office, and the prison have trifled with an innocent man's life. We hope that a higher level of Russia's judicial system will soon right the wrong done to Dennis.”

- Dennis has qualified to apply for early release from his six-year sentence since May 2019. This is because he spent some 2 years in pretrial detention and, according to Russian law, pretrial detention is applied 1.5 times toward his sentence.
- On June 23, a judge ruled to parole Dennis, while also fining him 400,000 rubles (US\$5,714). The prosecutor's office appealed, arguing Christensen allegedly violated prison rules. Three days after the June 23 ruling, prison officials placed Dennis in a special punishment cell for so-called violations of prison rules.
- Dennis' health has deteriorated while in prison. He contracted pneumonia. Although he recovered, he still suffers from a compromised immune system. According to his lawyer, the prison authorities claim that Dennis' medical records were "lost." The authorities have been using this as a pretext to discontinue his medical treatment.
- Dennis is the first of over 190 Jehovah's Witnesses who have spent time in prison or pretrial detention in modern Russia.
- See link to [infographic](#).

Interview opportunities

- Dennis' lawyer, Anton Bogdanov: dbhukukcu@gmail.com; or call +7903-45-43-037

International outcry | "Travesty of Justice"

The following are a few of the many examples of the international call for Russia to release Dennis:

- Amnesty International ([February 2019](#); [June](#), [July](#), and [September 2020](#))
- USCIRF ([May 2019](#); [July 2020](#))
- [European Union](#)
- [Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe](#)
- [UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet](#)
- Human Rights Watch ([February 2019](#); [July 2020](#))

Nationwide persecution (Russia and Crimea)

398 under criminal investigation

50 in prison (10 convicted; 40 pretrial detention)

27 under house arrest

1,163 homes raided since 2017 Supreme Court ruling (366 homes raided in 2020—even during the COVID-19 pandemic)

2019-20 prosecutions increase for not showing full official name

Religious organisations continue to be prosecuted for not showing their full official names on literature, online, and most frequently on buildings. The conviction rate is 72.5 per cent. A Constitutional Court appeal may clarify the law on how and where names should be displayed. Charges are also sometimes brought against individuals, despite the Supreme Court in 2017 clarifying that this should not happen.

By Victoria Arnold

Forum18 (19.10.2020) - <https://bit.ly/3e5qEDe> - Religious organisations in Russia continue to be prosecuted for not showing their full official names on literature, online, and most frequently of all, on their buildings – despite a lack of clear guidance in law on how and where names should be displayed.

Police and prosecutors also sometimes bring charges against individuals, even though only legal entities can be prosecuted under Administrative Code Article 5.26 Part 3 ("Implementation of activities by a religious organisation without indicating its official full name, including the issuing or distribution, within the framework of missionary activity, of literature and printed, audio, and video material without a label bearing this name, or with an incomplete or deliberately false label"). This was clarified by the Supreme Court, which on 7 November 2017 upheld the appeal of a Pentecostal pastor who argued that Part 3 could not apply either to private citizens or people employed in an official capacity (see below).

A religious organisation's full official name must indicate its religious affiliation and its organisational and legal form. Names therefore tend to be long and complicated, but use of an abbreviated form may incur prosecution (see below).

According to available court records, 98 prosecutions reached court between the beginning of January 2019 and the end of June 2020. These involved 76 registered religious organisations and 22 individuals. Most resulted in guilty verdicts and fines, with a conviction rate across the 18-month period of 72.5 per cent. Most of the eight acquittals were of people who should not have been prosecuted in the first place, and few appeals in any of the cases succeeded (see below).

Compared to 2018, the largest increase in the number of prosecutions by religious community was of Muslims, with 28 throughout 2019 and 6 in 2020 until the end of June (the decrease in 2020 was due to coronavirus restrictions). Throughout 2018 there were five such prosecutions of Muslim religious communities. It is unclear why such a sharp rise should have occurred, though it is also discernible among prosecutions in 2019 under Administrative Code Article 5.26 Parts 4 ("Russians conducting missionary activity") and 5 ("Foreigners conducting missionary activity") (see below).

Forty-one of Russia's 83 federal subjects saw at least one prosecution under Administrative Code Article 5.26 Part 3 in 2019 and the first half of 2020. This is a much wider distribution than the 24 regions in which there were prosecutions in 2018 (see below).

In six cases, judges also ordered the destruction of the religious literature which should have been labelled with religious organisations' full official names. In a further eight cases, items were ordered confiscated. It is unclear how far orders to destroy literature, including Korans and a Seventh-day Adventist newspaper, have been carried out (see below).

Many cases – particularly those based on the alleged absence of appropriate signage – involve very similar circumstances. Nevertheless, their outcomes may differ widely as a result of the law's lack of clarity on the issue and judges' varying interpretations both of the law itself and the seriousness of any violations (see below).

A Pentecostal church in the Moscow Region has appealed to the Constitutional Court in an attempt to clarify the question of where exactly an organisation's full official name should be displayed. (see below).

Lawyers hope that this may go some way towards improving the situation for religious communities. "As a result of [the Court's] consideration of our appeal, it will become clear where the 'plaque' with a name should be placed by religious organisations", lawyer Sergey Chugunov of the Slavic Centre for Law and Justice commented to Forum 18 on 9 October. "Of course, this should lead to a decrease in the number of such cases, since religious organisations will know how to implement the law, and law enforcement officers will not be able to apply this law arbitrarily". (see below).

The "anti-missionary" amendments were originally introduced as part of an "anti-terrorism" package of legislation proposed by four Duma deputies from the ruling United Russia Party. Forum 18 wrote to the two still in the Duma, Deputy Speaker Irina Yarovaya and Senator Aleksey Pushkov, asking what they think about the subsequent violation of so many people's right to freedom of religion and belief, and whether they thought the law should be clarified – for example as in the pending appeal to the Constitutional Court. The Federation Council's press relations department replied the same day that Senator Pushkov could not comment because of his heavy workload, but no reply has yet been received from Deputy Speaker Yarovaya's office (see below).

Religious organisations and individuals also continue to face prosecution under Administrative Code Article 5.26 Part 4 ("Russians conducting missionary activity") and Administrative Code Article 5.26, Part 5 ("Foreigners conducting missionary activity"). State officials across Russia have used the "anti-missionary" legislation to control and punish the exercise of freedom of religion or belief in public and even private space. Lawyers involved in these cases have said that the risk of prosecution has a chilling effect on people's exercise of freedom of religion or belief. "Believers don't understand what they can and can't do," Society for Krishna Consciousness lawyer Mikhail Frolov told Forum 18 in May 2019, "and because of heavy fines they don't want to take the risk and therefore significantly reduce their activity, especially in public"

Background

Administrative Code Article 5.26 Part 3 ("Implementation of activities by a religious organisation without indicating its official full name, including the issuing or distribution, within the framework of missionary activity, of literature and printed, audio, and video material without a label bearing this name, or with an incomplete or deliberately false label") came into force in July 2016, alongside Administrative Code Article 5.26 Parts 4 ("Russians conducting missionary activity") and 5 ("Foreigners conducting missionary activity").

Administrative Code Article 5.26 Part 3 introduced punishment for violations of Religion Law Article 8 Paragraph 8, which states that "A religious organisation is obliged to indicate its full name when carrying out activities". This requirement had been in force since the Religion Law's adoption in 1997, but had never before had an associated administrative offence.

A religious organisation's full official name must indicate its religious affiliation and its organisational and legal form ("Centralised Religious Organisation", "Local Religious Organisation", etc.). It therefore tends to be long and complicated, but use of an abbreviated form may incur prosecution.

The "anti-missionary" amendments were introduced as part of an "anti-terrorism" package of legislation proposed by Duma deputies Irina Yarovaya, Nadezhda Gerasimova, and Aleksey Pushkov, and Senator Viktor Ozerov. All are from the ruling United Russia Party.

Yarovaya is now Deputy Speaker of the Duma, Pushkov is now a senator, and the others have left the Duma. On 28 September, Forum 18 wrote to Yarovaya's press secretary, and on 29 September to Pushkov, asking them what they think about the subsequent violation of so many people's right to freedom of religion and belief, and whether they thought the law should be clarified, for example with regard to exactly where the religious organisation should display its full official name as in the the pending appeal to the Constitutional Court. The Federation Council's press relations department replied the same day that Senator Pushkov could not comment because of his heavy workload. No reply has yet been received from Deputy Speaker Yarovaya's office.

Possible punishments

According to the Administrative Code, under Article 5.26 Part 3, religious organisations may be fined 30,000 to 50,000 Roubles with the possible confiscation of any materials involved in the alleged offence. Such materials may later be destroyed (see below). Judges may also decide to issue only a warning, because of the "insignificance of the offence", according to verdicts.

A fine of 30,000 Roubles represents about three weeks' average wages for those in work, or just over two months' average pension. A fine of 50,000 Roubles represents nearly six weeks' average wages for those in work, or 16 weeks' average state retirement pension.

In 2019 and the first half of 2020, 62 of the 71 defendants found guilty received fines (before any appeal), while three were given a warning. One case was closed with oral remarks only, and another closed with no punishment because of the insignificance of the offence, but the defendants were still convicted. In four cases, the punishment imposed remains unknown.

Destruction of religious literature

Forum 18 found 14 cases in 2019-20 in which judges ordered the confiscation of religious literature which had allegedly been "distributed as part of missionary activity" and should therefore have been bearing the religious organisations' full official names. In six of these cases, the books, magazines, CDs, or newspapers were also ordered destroyed.

In May 2020, according to verdicts available on court websites, police confiscated copies of the Koran from two mosques in Nizhnevartovsk (Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Region). Judges at separate magistrate's courts found both religious organisations guilty of not labelling the books with their full official names, fined them 30,000 Roubles each, and decided that the Korans (three in total) should be destroyed, alongside a volume of hadiths (sayings of the Prophet Mohammed) entitled Bulugh al-Maram.

Forum 18 wrote to the Bailiffs' Department for Nizhnevartovsk and Nizhnevartovsk District and the press office of the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Region's Bailiff Service before the start of the Khanty-Mansi working day of 6 October, asking whether the religious literature confiscated from the mosques had indeed been destroyed and how this had been done.

The press office of the Region's Bailiff Service confirmed on 9 October that the court orders had been carried out, but did not describe how. It added that property which passes into state ownership should be transferred to the Federal Agency for the Administration of State Property (Rosimushchestvo). The Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Region's Rosimushchestvo branch told Forum 18 on 13 October to direct such queries to the Nizhnevartovsk Bailiffs' Department. The precise fate of the Korans therefore remains unclear.

A single visit from a Justice Ministry official led to two separate prosecutions on 20 January 2020 of the Seventh-day Adventist church in Yakutsk (Republic of Sakha-Yakutiya), two fines totalling 60,000 Roubles, and two court orders for the destruction of unlabelled literature seized from the church's premises. This included multiple copies of the Seventh-day Adventist newspaper "Hidden Treasure", which had been on a table in a corridor (and were therefore "freely accessible to visitors", according to the verdict), and a book (its title redacted in the verdict) which had been presented to the pastor during Bible study. This book did display the church's name, but in a different form from the full official version (Local Religious Organisation Church of Seventh-day Adventist Christians, Yakutsk).

Forum 18 has been unable to establish what happened to these materials. The Republic of Sakha-Yakutiya's Bailiff Service told Forum 18 on 16 October that its automated record system had no record of the court orders having been enforced. Forum 18 also wrote to the Republic's Rosimushchestvo branch before the start of its working day on 13 October, but has received no response. The Adventist Church itself has also not replied to Forum 18's 8 October enquiry about whether the literature had been destroyed.

In December 2017, in rejecting a Salvation Army branch's appeal against an Administrative Code Article 5.26 Part 3 conviction, the Constitutional Court clarified the requirement to label religious literature with organisations' full official names. The Court stated that the labelling requirement does not apply if "there is no possibility of missionary activity", but also that "The distribution of religious literature and materials of religious purpose as part of missionary activity should be understood not only as the delivery of these materials to specific individuals, but also as the provision of free access to this literature and these materials to an indefinite number of persons".

Nineteen of the 24 literature-related cases found by Forum 18 in 2019-20 involved materials found by police or prosecutors on a religious organisation's premises (rather than being actively distributed elsewhere). This suggests that proving that "there is no possibility of missionary activity" is difficult, and that simply leaving books or magazines out in the open inside a place of worship is enough to be prosecuted.

Statistics: January 2019 to June 2020

In an analysis of available court records, Forum 18 found a total of 98 prosecutions brought to court under Administrative Code Article 5.26 Part 3 in the calendar year 2019 and the first six months of 2020. It is unknown how many other religious organisations (and individuals) may have faced charges, as cases under Part 3 are heard in magistrates' courts, of which there are more than 7,000 across the country. Establishing accurate figures is therefore difficult if communities do not themselves make prosecutions known.

Eighty of these 98 prosecutions reached court in 2019, and only 18 in the first half of 2020 (as a result of restrictions on court functions imposed during Russia's coronavirus lockdown).

The 2019 figure marks an increase on 2018, which saw 54 prosecutions under Administrative Code Article 5.26 Part 3. Lawyer Sergey Chugunov of the Slavic Centre for Law and Justice has also noted this increase, and traces it to a rise in prosecutions for failing to display full official names on buildings (as opposed to on religious literature), he told Forum 18 on 8 October.

The 98 prosecutions found by Forum 18 involved 76 registered religious organisations and 22 individuals (four women, 18 men – one of them twice). Many cases are based on routine "inspections of compliance with the requirements" of the Religion Law and the

Extremism Law, carried out by prosecutors' offices or regional branches of the Justice Ministry. A few arose from police or FSB security service surveillance of a religious organisation's premises.

The total of 98 prosecutions includes two cases which judges reclassified as Administrative Code Article 5.26 Part 4 ("Russians conducting missionary activity"), which were not included in Forum 18's examination of Part 4 prosecutions. They are counted here because the defendants were originally brought to court under Part 3.

One police visit or prosecutor's office inspection may lead to charges under both Part 3 and Part 4 ("Russians conducting missionary activity"). For example, the Local Religious Organisation of Muslims of Khimki, Moscow Region, received a 30,000 Rouble fine on 15 August 2019 for not displaying its full official name at the cultural centre where it carries out its activities (according to the verdict, there was an incomplete sign on an internal door). The prosecutors checking the organisation's "compliance with the Religion Law" also charged it under Article 5.26 Part 4 for using a corridor and rooms which had not been included in the community's agreement of free use of the cultural centre.

Similarly, Protestant Vladimir Akulov was charged under both Article 5.26 Part 3 and Part 4 for distributing unlabelled religious literature at a block of flats in Oymyakon (Republic of Sakha-Yakutiya) and talking to residents about religious topics. A judge fined him 5,000 Roubles under Part 4 for performing "missionary activity" on residential premises (where it is explicitly forbidden in law). However, he was later acquitted of a charge under Part 3 as he could not be prosecuted as an individual.

Most acquittals of people who should not have been prosecuted in the first place

First instance courts convicted a total of 71 defendants and acquitted only eight. This gives an initial conviction rate of 72.5 per cent

Judges sent another six cases back to police or prosecutors on technical grounds and closed a further four for unknown reasons. Six defendants were freed from administrative liability. This means that judges concluded that they had committed an offence, but it was insignificant enough for responsibility to be lifted. Any similar alleged violation in the future will therefore count as a first offence.

One case was dropped because it reached court after the permitted time period for prosecutions had passed. (The statute of limitations on administrative offences examined by a judge is three months.) The outcome of two cases remains unknown.

Six of the eight acquittals found by Forum 18 were of individuals who should not have been charged at all, as Administrative Code Article 5.26 Part 3 is only applicable to legal entities. Only two religious organisations were acquitted.

Wrongful prosecutions of individuals

Forum 18 found that 22 individuals (four women, 18 men) were brought to court in 2019 and the first half of 2020 under Administrative Code Article 5.26 Part 3. One man was charged twice for similar alleged offences.

This is despite the fact that only legal entities are subject to prosecution under Part 3, as the the law itself only explicitly mentions religious organisations. Russia's Supreme Court clarified this point in a ruling of 7 November 2017, which upheld the appeal of a Pentecostal pastor who argued that Part 3, as written, could not apply either to private citizens or people employed in an official capacity.

Police and prosecutors' offices appear to be equally responsible for the misapplication of Part 3, each initiating nine cases against individuals in the 18-month period examined by Forum 18. The Justice Ministry brought charges in one case, while the origins of another three remain unknown.

The Supreme Court's 2017 ruling is having some effect on the outcomes of such cases, as was also the case in 2018. Of the 22 people known to have been prosecuted in 2019-20, twelve were convicted in the first instance and six were acquitted. All the judges in the acquittals noted that individuals should not be prosecuted under Part 3. Judges sent a further four cases back to police and prosecutors.

The Justice Ministry's Lipetsk Region branch charged Olga Chernykh, chair of the Religious Organisation of Modern (Progressive) Judaism of the City of Lipetsk, because there was no sign at the organisation's office displaying its full official name. This was because the organisation had stopped using that office and had not yet updated its address on its documents. The judge at Lipetsk's Soviet District Magistrate's Court No. 16 acquitted Chernykh explicitly because only organisations can be charged under Administrative Code Article 5.26 Part 3.

Five convicted individuals lodged appeals and all were successful. Seven people therefore ended up with punishments (one warning, six fines), when they should not even have been charged.

After an inspection of compliance with the Extremism Law, prosecutors took imam Ismail Deberbeyev to court because his mosque had no sign displaying its full official name (Local Muslim Religious Organisation "Makhalla No. 2116", Srednyaya Yelyuzan village, Gorodishche District, Penza Region, Central Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Russia). The judge at Gorodishche District Magistrate's Court No. 2 fined Deberbeyev 30,000 Roubles on 3 October 2019. The appeal judge at Gorodishche District Court, however, acknowledged the Supreme Court ruling and overturned Deberbeyev's conviction on that basis.

In a similar case, after a prosecutor's office inspection, Gulomali Rasulov, chairman of the Local Religious Organisation of Muslims "Mosque" of the City of Usolye-Sibirskoye, Irkutsk Region, received a fine of 30,000 Roubles for not having a sign with the community's full official name on his mosque's façade or fence. The judge at Usolye-Sibirskoye and Usolye District Magistrate's Court No. 92 made no acknowledgement of the Supreme Court ruling and convicted Rasulov despite the fact he should not have been charged at all. Rasulov did not appeal.

Few appeals succeed

Defendants submitted initial appeals in 32 cases. These were either to district or city courts within 10 days of the original verdict, or as supervisory appeals after the original ruling came into force. (Supervisory appeals were heard in regional courts until October 2019, thereafter in one of nine newly established cassational courts which each deals with a number of federal subjects.)

Of these initial appeals, 22 were unsuccessful and only nine successful, while one was rejected without being considered.

Ten defendants challenged their unsuccessful appeal rulings at the supervisory level. Two of these were rejected without consideration and the rest were again unsuccessful. Police, prosecutors, and Justice Ministry branches lodged only five appeals, none of which succeeded.

Religious profile – another shift towards more prosecutions of Muslims?

Prosecutions between 1 January 2019 and the end of June 2020 were brought against individuals or organisations of the following beliefs:

Pentecostal and independent Protestant – 35 (31 in 2019, 4 in January-June 2020)
Muslim – 34 (28, 6)
Baptist (including Baptist Union, Council of Churches, and unknown affiliation) – 6 (6 in 2019, 0 in January-June 2020)
Seventh-day Adventist – 6 (1 in 2019, 5 in January-June 2020)
Methodist – 4 (2 in 2019, 2 in January-June 2020)
Jewish – 3 (3 in 2019, 0 in January-June 2020)
Society for Krishna Consciousness – 3 (3 in 2019, 0 in January-June 2020)
Lutheran – 2 (2 in 2019, 0 in January-June 2020)
Roman Catholic – 1 (1 in 2019, 0 in January-June 2020)
New Apostolic – 1 (1 in 2019, 0 in January-June 2020)
New Age (the syncretistic Church Universal and Triumphant) – 1 (1 in 2019, 0 in January-June 2020)
Old Believer – 1 (1 in 2019, 0 in January-June 2020)
Chuvash pagan – 1 (0 in 2019, 1 in January-June 2020)

This represents a considerable increase on 2018 in both the number and proportion of prosecutions relating to Muslim religious organisations (or individuals). In 2018 there were only five such cases under Administrative Code Article 5.26 Part 3 out of a total of 54. It is unclear why such a sharp rise should have occurred, though it is also discernible among prosecutions in 2019 under Administrative Code Article 5.26 Parts 4 ("Russians conducting missionary activity") and 5 ("Foreigners conducting missionary activity").

Muslim-related cases show a wide geographical spread across 17 federal subjects – Astrakhan Region, Republic of Bashkortostan, Republic of Kabardino-Balkariya, Irkutsk Region, Republic of Kalmykiya, Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Region, Kurgan Region, Leningrad Region, Mari El Republic, Moscow, Moscow Region, Penza Region, Primorye Region, Rostov Region, Stavropol Region, St Petersburg, Ulyanovsk Region. These federal subjects have varying proportions of the population who are (at least nominally) Muslim.

Broad geographical spread

Forty-one of Russia's 83 federal subjects saw at least one prosecution under Administrative Code Article 5.26 Part 3 in 2019 and the first half of 2020 (36 in 2019, 12 in 2020). These figures do not include prosecutions in the Russian-occupied and illegally annexed Crimean peninsula.

This is a much wider distribution than the 24 regions in which there were prosecutions in 2018.

The highest numbers of prosecutions were in the Republic of Sakha-Yakutiya (8), Moscow (7), Penza Region (6), Moscow Region (5), and Primorye Region (5). Two of the Sakha-Yakutiya cases derived from the same inspection of a Seventh-day Adventist church in Yakutsk (see above). Two more involved a Yakutsk Protestant church and its pastor. Similar multiple prosecutions were seen in Moscow.

Continued broad interpretation of the law

Administrative Code Article 5.26 Part 3 refers only to the "activity" of religious organisations, during which they must display their full official names, without further

specification. Consequently, religious organisations can be prosecuted for not displaying their full official names while doing a wide range of different things. As noted above, the full official name must indicate the religious affiliation of a religious association and its organisational and legal form ("Centralised Religious Organisation", "Local Religious Organisation", etc.). It therefore tends to be long and complicated, but use of an abbreviated form may incur prosecution.

In 2019 and the first half of 2020, Forum 18 found that most prosecutions were for failing to display full official names on religious organisations' premises (or premises where they were holding events) – a total of 57 cases. There were 24 cases involving unlabelled literature (19 for literature found on an organisation's own premises, five for literature distributed elsewhere). Eight cases involved the failure to use full official names on religious organisations' websites and/or social media, and three were based on the lack of full official names in official documents or correspondence. The basis for prosecution in 18 cases remains unknown.

These figures add up to more than the overall total of prosecutions in 2019-20 because police and prosecutors alleged that some defendants had committed more than one type of violation.

In most cases based on the absence of a sign, written verdicts suggest that the required signage was entirely absent. Nevertheless, there are also many instances in which the law's lack of clarity on where and when such signs should be displayed, and the requirement for so much information in an organisation's formal title – or sheer bad luck – mean that communities can be prosecuted even when they have tried to abide by the law. Forum 18 found examples of signs being present but indoors, present but temporarily obscured, and present but displaying an abbreviated name – as well as signs which were only temporarily absent.

On 15 January 2019, Chebarkul and Chebarkul District Magistrate's Court No. 1 (Chelyabinsk Region) fined the Religious Organisation of Chebarkul "Light of Truth" Church of Christians of Evangelical Faith (Pentecostals) 30,000 Roubles for failing to display a sign with its full official name on the façade of the house where members meet for worship. A church representative pointed out that a sign was hung at the entrance of the prayer room within the house during worship. However, the judge decided that such information should be displayed continuously – despite this not being stated in the law.

The Local Religious Organisation of Muslims of the City of Luga and Luga District was found guilty on 19 September 2019 of not displaying its full official name on its historic mosque building. The mosque chairman pointed out that he had removed the sign at the request of the city's chief architect as it had been too large for a cultural monument, and had not yet put up a new one at the time of the prosecutor's office inspection (though had done so by the day of the court hearing). The judge at Luga District Magistrate's Court No. 81 (Leningrad Region) decided not to impose punishment and closed the case with oral remarks only.

The Local Religious Organisation "Tyumen United Methodist Church 'Salvation'" was fined 45,000 Roubles at Lenin District Magistrate's Court No. 12 on 14 May 2020 for not showing its full official name at the premises where it holds services. Pastor Yekaterina Zubkova was also charged, but the judge returned her case to prosecutors. In court, the defence argued that the church rents only part of the building, at the entrance to which an appropriate sign is displayed before all events, and that the prosecutor's office inspection had taken place outside service times. The regional FSB security service had informed the prosecutors' office about the absence of a sign.

The church's initial appeal to Tyumen's Lenin District Court was unsuccessful on 10 July 2020. On 24 September 2020, its lawyers, Yevgeny Shestakov and Ruslan Yakin, lodged a supervisory appeal at the 7th Cassational Court in Chelyabinsk. It is unknown when this will be considered.

"How a religious organisation is obliged to indicate its full name when carrying out activities, and what it means for a religious organisation to carry out activities without specifying its official full name is not established by law", Shestakov commented to Forum 18 on 13 October. He noted that the Methodists had posted their religious organisation's full name both in the window at the entrance to the building and on the door of the room where they hold meetings for worship. "In the opinion of the prosecutor's office, and now by the decision of the court (magistrate's and district), this is considered non-fulfilment of [Religion Law] Article 8 Paragraph 8, and is a violation under Administrative Code Article 5.26 Part 3. That is, [the Methodists] were convicted precisely for the absence of a sign on the fence or at the entrance to the building".

Shestakov attributed the size of the fine (close to the maximum permitted) to the fact that the church refused to admit any wrongdoing and argued its case in court. It was a "significant" burden for a small church, he added, but other Protestant churches in Tyumen had assisted in paying it.

Lack of consistency in court rulings

Many cases under Administrative Code Article 5.26 Part 3 – particularly those based on the alleged absence of appropriate signage – involve very similar circumstances. Nevertheless, their outcomes may differ widely as a result of the law's lack of clarity on the issue and judges' varying interpretations both of the law itself and the seriousness of any violations.

For example, the Local Religious Organisation Muslim Religious Centre "Islam", Yashalta District, Republic of Kalmykiya, was charged with carrying out "services, other religious rites, and ceremonies" (considered by police to be missionary activity) without displaying a sign with its full official name on its building. Yashalta District Magistrate's Court found the community guilty on 19 December 2019 and imposed a fine of 30,000 Roubles. The community's appeal – at Yashalta District Court on 19 February 2020 – was unsuccessful, despite its argument that the community exists solely on donations which are "barely enough for the purchase of religious items necessary for the administration of religious rites and for utilities".

In contrast, on 8 November 2019, the judge at Almenyevo District Magistrate's Court No. 1 (Kurgan Region) freed two Muslim religious organisations from administrative liability for the lack of signs on their buildings showing their full official names. These are:

- Local Muslim Religious Organisation "Makhalla No. 2073", Maylyk Village, Almenyevo District, Kurgan Region;
- and Local Muslim Religious Organisation "Makhalla No. 737", Podyasovo Village, Almenyevo District, Regional Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the Kurgan Region, part of the TsDUM [Central Spiritual Administration of Muslims] of Russia.

The judge concluded that offences had been committed, although the first makhalla did have a "homemade sign" in the Tatar language, according to the verdict. However, the judge decided that the offences were so insignificant as not to warrant punishment.

Such inconsistency also appears among cases based on activities outside religious organisations' own premises. A Pentecostal church in the Krasnoyarsk Region was acquitted of failing to display its full official name (Local Religious Organisation Church of

Christians of Evangelical Faith (Pentecostals) "Glorification Church", Achinsk) at the holiday camp where it was holding a conference on working with former prisoners – the judge at Achinsk and Achinsk District Magistrate's Court No. 145 decided on 25 February 2019 that there is nothing in the legislation which requires a religious organisation to display its full official name on property which is not its own.

A Baptist church involved in the organisation of a similar event – a conference for children's ministers in Vladivostok – was also charged with failing to display its full official name (Local Religious Organisation Church of Evangelical Christian-Baptists "Transfiguration", Vladivostok) at the sanatorium hired for the event. A magistrate's court in the city's Lenin District found the church guilty in May 2019 under both Part 3 and Part 4 ("Russians conducting missionary activities") of Administrative Code Article 5.26, fined it 100,000 Roubles, and ordered the confiscation of the literature the church had offered for sale.

New appeal to Constitutional Court

The Religion Law's failure to specify exactly where and how a religious organisation's full official name should be displayed is now the subject of an appeal to Russia's Constitutional Court. Lawyers hope a successful appeal will in future mean that there will be fewer prosecutions for the lack of proper signage reaching court.

The Constitutional Court accepted the appeal on 23 June 2020, and is likely to consider it before the end of October (it is currently second on the list). The Court will make its ruling without holding hearings, and has instead sought depositions from the legislative bodies concerned,

The appeal is based on the case of the Local Religious Organisation Church of Christians of Evangelical Faith (Pentecostals) "Word of Life", which received a fine of 30,000 Roubles on 15 July 2019 at Dolgoprudny Magistrate's Court No. 30 (Moscow Region). Prosecutors charged the church under Administrative Code Article 5.26 Part 3 for not having a sign with its full official name on the external walls of its building or at the entrance to its grounds.

The church argued that the owner of the premises does not permit them to have such a sign, and that, as the law does not specify where the sign should be, it had placed one at the entrance of the room in which meetings for worship are held. The church's appeals to Dolgoprudny City Court on 5 September 2019 and the 1st Cassational Court in Saratov on 19 February 2020 were unsuccessful.

"It is difficult to say what kind of decision the court will make", lawyer Sergey Chugunov, who lodged the appeal on behalf of the church, told Forum 18 on 9 October. "Maybe the [legal] norms will be recognised as inconsistent with the Constitution of the Russian Federation, but maybe not".

If the Constitutional Court decides that Religion Law Article 8 Paragraph 8 is unconstitutional in its current form, legislators will have to make appropriate amendments. Even if the Court concludes otherwise, as Chugunov pointed out to Forum 18, it will still give an "interpretation" of the disputed piece of legislation. "Therefore, as a result of [the Court's] consideration of our appeal, it will become clear where the 'plaque' with the name should be placed by religious organisations. Of course, this should lead to a decrease in the number of such cases, since religious organisations will know how to implement the law, and law enforcement officers will not be able to apply this law arbitrarily".

"I believe that this is absolutely the right decision [to lodge the appeal]", Yevgeny Shestakov, lawyer for the Tyumen United Methodist Church, told Forum 18 on 13 October. "The clarity and accuracy of the law and its enforcement in practice has long been in need of correction".

Special bimonthly FORB Digest (01-16.10.2020)

16.10.20 - Already 700 days in detention. How is trial of 66-year-old believer Saveliev going in Novosibirsk?

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2020/10/8.html>

Judge Ekaterina Kashina did not release the believer from the pre-trial detention center either due to the pandemic or even after the cassation decision on the illegality of his further detention. At the sessions, the court listens to the Orthodox sectologist's reasoning.

Continue reading...

15.10.20 - Russian parliament backs away from controversial change in religion law

Link to full text in Russian: <https://www.pnp.ru/politics/v-gosdume-predlagayut-osvobodit-deystvuyushhikh-svyashhennikov-ot-obyazatelnoy-atteestacii.html>

Deputies are preparing amendments that will free clergy and religious personnel of churches who are already active from mandatory certification and from getting supplementary professional education.

Continue reading...

14.10.20 - In Ivanovo Region, a sentence came into force on the believer Evgeniy Spirin.

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2020/10/7.html>

On October 14, 2020, Ivanovo regional court upheld the sentence of [Evgeniy Spirin](#), a 34-year-old believer from the town of Furmanov, who was [fined](#) 700 000 rubles for "extremism" by Furmanov town court in July. Given the time spent in detention, the amount payable is 500,000 rubles.

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13.10.20 - More harassment of Jehovah's Witnesses in Penza region

Link to full text in Russian: <https://www.zaprava.ru/v-penzenskoj-oblasti-pravooxraniteli-prishli-s-obyskami-k-chetyryom-semyam-svidetelej-iegovy/>

On 11 October, in Penza oblast, searches were conducted in the homes of Jehovah's Witnesses (an organization ruled to be extremist in the R.F.). As reported on the

Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia website, armed security agents invaded the homes of at least four families of believers, who live in the city of Nikolsk, 100 kilometers from Penza.

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13.10.20 - High court in south Russia rules in Jehovah's Witness' favor

Link to full text in Russian: <https://ovdinfo.org/express-news/2020/10/13/v-dagestane-priznali-nezakonnym-otkaz-v-kompensacii-za-arest-svidetelya>

On 7 October, the Dagestan Supreme Court ruled that the refusal of compensation for Jehovah's Witness Arsen Abdullaev was not in compliance with the law; he was detained in a SIZO for several months illegally. This was reported by Kavkaz.Realii, citing the believer's lawyer, Maksim Pervunin.

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12.10.20 - Russian rights advocate defends Jehovah's Witness couple

Link to full text in Russian: <https://www.kasparov.ru/material.php?id=5F840423B31BB>

Judge Ivan Bogomolov of the Sverdlovsk district court of Kostroma sentenced Jehovah's Witnesses Sergei and Valeria Raiman to suspended sentences of 8 and 7 years respectively. This was more than the state prosecution asked for.

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12.10.20 - In Stavropol, law enforcers planted banned literature on an elderly believer and "found" it during a search.

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2020/10/5.html>

In the afternoon of October 6, 2020 in the village of Solnechnodolsk, located about 60 kilometers from Stavropol, law enforcement officers searched the 64-year-old Gennady Serdyukov and planted three books from the Federal List of Extremist Materials.

[Continue reading...](#)

09.10.20 - Russian parliament upsets religious leaders

Link to full text in Russian: <https://ria.ru/20201009/semya--1578897783.html>

Broad discussion of a draft law concerning the procedure for removal of children from a family should have been conducted with the participation of representatives of confessions back before the introduction of the document into the State Duma, the ruling bishop of the Russian Associated Union of Christians of Evangelical Faith—Pentecostals, Sergei Riakhovsky declared.

[Continue reading...](#)

09.10.20- Longest prison term yet for Jehovah's Witness

Link to full text in Russian: <https://kostroma.today/news/kostromskix-svidetelej-iegovy-vstretili-posle-prigovora-cvetami/>

The married couple Sergei and Valeria Raiman, who today were found guilty of creating the Kostroma organization of Jehovah's Witnesses (forbidden in Russia and ruled extremist), were greeted today at the courtroom with flowers from relatives, friends, and fellow believers, a Kostroma Today correspondent reports.

Continue reading...

08.10.20 - Orthodox patriarch immobilized by COVID-19

Link to full text in Russian: <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=dujour&div=447>

Patriarch of Moscow and all-Rus Kirill did not participate in the traditional celebration of the day of the repose of Saint Sergius of Radonezh, which is marked on 8 October, because he is in quarantine.

Continue reading...

08.10.20 - Six Jehovah's Witnesses found guilty and sentenced

Link to full text in Russian:
https://73online.ru/r/v_ulyanovske_osudili_svideteley_iegovy-82180

Today, 8 October, a court issued a verdict for six residents of Ulyanovsk, members of the religious organization of Jehovah's Witnesses, which is forbidden in Russia.

Continue reading...

07.10.20 - An acquittal verdict - for the first time in three years - handed to one of Jehovah's Witnesses. Yuriy Zalipayev of Kabardino-Balkaria found not guilty

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2020/10/2.html>

On October 7, 2020, Elena Kudryavtseva, a judge of the May District Court of Kabardino-Balkaria, acquitted Yuriy Zalipayev, having found the accusations of calls to extremism unproven. Unfair criminal prosecution of the believer lasted more than 4 years. If the prosecutor's office does not appeal the sentence, it will take effect.

Continue reading...

02.10.20 - After the searches in Sevastopol, four peaceful believers were sent to a detention center for at least two months

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2020/10/1.html>

On October 1, 2020, law enforcers searched at least 9 local residents in Sevastopol. The next day the court sent Vladimir Maladyka, Yevgeni Zhukov, Vladimir Sakada and Igor

Schmidt to the detention center. Several years ago, law enforcers unsuccessfully tried to plant a banned book on believers.

Continue reading...

Fifty international scholars call for an end of the persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia

CESNUR (01.10.2020) – Fifty leading international scholars of religion have signed an appeal calling for the immediate end of the persecution of the Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia, a country where members of the religious organization are routinely arrested and sentenced to terms in jail, and where all activities of their congregation are forbidden. The document was born out of a conference on opposition to the Jehovah's Witnesses held online from Vilnius, Lithuania, on September 3, whose speakers were the first to sign, followed by colleagues from all over the world, including Russia itself and China.

"It seems that Jehovah's Witnesses are really punished in Russia because of their growth, which is an unwelcome competition for the powerful Russian Orthodox Church," commented Italian sociologist Massimo Introvigne, who helped draft the statement. "The government and the Russian Orthodox Church may not like proselytization, added Alessandro Amicarelli, a human rights lawyer in London and the president of the European Federation for Freedom of Belief (FOB), also a co-drafter of the appeal, but the freedom to proselytize and to persuade members of other religions is an integral part of freedom of religion under Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which Russia has subscribed."

The fifty scholars urged "President Putin and his administration to take action to cease the systematic and senseless persecution of the Jehovah's Witnesses, a community of peaceful, law-abiding citizens who only ask to practice their faith in peace."

See the text of the letter and the signatures at: <https://www.cesnur.org/2020/jehovahs-witnesses-statement.htm>.

For more information, email: cesnur_to@virgilio.it, contact@freedomofbelief.net.

Special bimonthly FORB Digest (16-30.09.2020)

29.09.20 - Judge says prosecution did not prove case against Jehovah's Witness

Link to full text in Russian:

<https://ovdinfo.org/express-news/2020/09/29/sud-vo-vladivostoke-vernul-delo-svidetelnicy-iegovy-v-prokuraturu>

The Pervorechensk district court of Vladivostok ordered the return to the prosecutor's office of the case of Jehovah's Witness Elena Barmakina, accused of participation in the activity of an extremist organization (part 2, article 282.2 C.C.). This is reported on the website of the Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia.

Continue reading...

26.09.20 - Russian parliament delays consideration of controversial changes in religion law

Link to full text in Russian: <https://ria.ru/20200926/zakon-1577815329.html>

The draft law "On introducing changes into federal law 'On freedom of conscience and religious associations'" can be adopted only in the event of its approval by the traditional confessions, declared the chairman of the Department for External Church Relations of the Moscow patriarchate, Metropolitan of Volokolamsk Ilarion.

Continue reading...

25.09.20 - Black Sea resort church fined for breaking antievangelism law

Link to full text in Russian: <https://anapa-ch.ru/pastora-missionerskoj-cerkvi-anapy-priznali-narushitelem-i-oshtrafovali/>

During a verification of compliance with legislation on freedom of conscience and religious associations back in the summer, the Anapa inter-district prosecutor's office established that the religious group "Tree of Life Church Anapa" was conducting missionary activity without submitting the mandatory notification about the start of its activity in the directorate of the Ministry of Justice of the territory.

Continue reading...

25.09.20 - Two years of conditional imprisonment for faith. A 73-year-old woman and a married couple sentenced in Kamchatka

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2020/09/10.html>

Kamchatka residents Vera Zolotova and spouses Konstantin and Snezhana Bazhenovs were found guilty of involvement in the activities of an extremist organization.

Continue reading...

25.09.20 - State acts to legally abolish Siberian sect

Link to full text in Russian: <https://rg.ru/2020/09/25/reg-sibfo/krasnoyarskie-prokurory-zaiavili-isk-o-likvidacii-cerkvi-poslednego-zaveta.html>

On the basis of an inspection, the prosecutor's office of Krasnoyarsk territory sent to a court a lawsuit requesting the liquidation of the religious organization "Church of the Last Testament." As reported in the press service of the office of prosecutor general of the Russian Federation, the basis for submitting a lawsuit was incidents discovered in the course of an inspection that involved experts.

Continue reading...

25.09.20 - The detention of believers from Dagestan was illegal. This was the ruling of the Fifth Court of Cassation in Pyatigorsk

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2020/09/9.html>

The confusion on the faces of prosecutors on September 21, 2020 was caused by the decision of the Fifth Court of Cassation of General Jurisdiction that the detention of four Jehovah's Witnesses from Makhachkala was illegal.

Continue reading...

24.09.20 - Russian law enforcement in Far East gives Jehovah's Witnesses a break

Link to full text in Russian: <https://www.sibreal.org/a/30855335.html>

The directorate of the F.S.B. [Federal Security Service] for Sakhalin oblast in late August ended the criminal prosecution of residents of Nevelsk for religious activity. The case against Viacheslav Ivanov and Dmitry Kulakov was closed, a representative of the European Association of Jehovah's Witnesses, Yaroslav Sivulsky, reported on 24 September.

[Continue reading...](#)

23.09.20 - Law enforcement moves against Russian sect in Siberia

Link to full text in Russian: <https://tass.ru/proisshestviya/9525939>

The Central district court of Novosibirsk on Tuesday placed Sergei Torop into custody; he is the founder of the Church of the Last Testament who calls himself Vissarion. Also detained were leaders of the religious association, Vladimir Vedernikov and Vadim Redkin.

[Continue reading...](#)

22.09.20 - Drawn-out trial reaches conclusion for Jehovah's Witness

Link to full text in Russian: <https://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/354436/>

The prosecution requested two years in a penal colony settlement for a Jehovah's Witness from Maisky, Yury Zalipaev. Zalipaev's defense attorney requested that the court fully exonerate him, recalling the contradictions in witnesses' testimony.

[Continue reading...](#)

21.09.20 - Russian parliament will consider changes in religion law tomorrow

Link to full text in Russian: https://www.ng.ru/editorial/2020-09-20/2_7968_editorial.html

On 22 September, the State Duma will consider on first reading amendments to the law "On freedom of conscience and religious association," submitted by the government. The document has received contradictory reviews already in the stage of discussion. Some in the State Duma consider that the new rules will permit shielding citizens from extremism and improve the effectiveness of monitoring religious life.

[Continue reading...](#)

19.09.20 - Russian Bible Society feels harassed

Link to full text in Russian: <https://credo.press/233056/>

The head of the council of the Chertanovo Central district of Moscow sent to the Russian Bible Society on 16 September an order by 21 September (that is, in five days) "to carry out independently the demolition of objects" located on a plot of land rented by the society.

[Continue reading...](#)

19.09.20 - Bible under threat

Link to full text in Russian: <http://rbo.ru/news/show/?894>

In the midst of the quarantine, the Russian Bible Society received a notification from the government of Moscow that our warehouses, in which about 150,000 books of Sacred Scripture are stored, will soon be demolished.

Continue reading...

18.09.20 - Russian religions oppose changes in religion law

Link to full text in Russian: <https://vz.ru/society/2020/9/18/458782.html>

Next week will begin in the State Duma a consideration of amendments in the law "On freedom of conscience," which, in the opinion of their initiators will prevent the appearance in Russia of religious extremists and protect the country from "religious neocolonialism."

Continue reading...

17.09.20 - Russian parliament considering changes in religion law

Link to full text in Russian: <https://yandex.com/turbo/vz.ru/s/news/2020/9/17/1060894.html>

"We understand that the amendments are aimed, in the first place, at combating extremism and terrorism on religious grounds, but the struggle with extremism and terrorism should be conducted without causing damage to confessions that are traditional for Russia."

Continue reading...

17.09.20 - Appeals court frees Jehovah's Witness while retaining restrictions on activity

Link to full text in Russian: <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/4493822>

The Penza oblast court mitigated the sentence for Penza resident Vladimir Alushkin, who was found guilty in December of last year of organizing an extremist religious congregation. According to the account of the investigation, Alushkin and his five supporters created in Penza the "Arbekovo. Penza" religious organization of Jehovah's Witnesses (considered extremist and banned in the R.F.).

Continue reading...

17.09.20 - Jehovah's Witness held accountable for long past alleged indiscretions

Link to full text in Russian: <https://rostof.ru/articles/v-rostove-za-pedofiliyu-osudili-svidetelya-iegovy>

A resident of Rostov was found guilty of crimes against the sexual inviolability of minors and of participation in the activity of an extremist organization, the press service of the S.K.R.

Continue reading...

16.09.20 - The appeal filed in the City of Penza reversed the prison sentence for Vladimir Alushkin. Six believers received a suspended sentence.

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2020/09/7.html>

September 16, 2020 Penza Regional Court commuted the sentence of Vladimir Alushkin, replacing 6 years in prison with 4 years of suspended sentence.

[Continue reading...](#)

Cult leader who claims to be reincarnation of Jesus arrested in Russia

Former traffic officer Sergei Torop, AKA Vissarion, arrested in special operation in Siberia.

By Shaun Walker

The Guardian (22.09.2020) - <https://bit.ly/3kBQVuQ> - Russian authorities mounted a special operation to arrest a former traffic police officer who claims to be the reincarnation of Jesus and has run a cult based in the depths of Siberia for the past three decades.

Helicopters and armed officers stormed communities run by Sergei Torop, known to his followers as Vissarion, and arrested him and two of his aides. Russia's investigative committee said it would charge him with organising an illegal religious organisation, alleging that the cult extorted money from followers and subjected them to emotional abuse.

Torop, 59, with long grey hair and a beard, was led by masked troops to a helicopter. The operation involved agents from Russia's FSB security service as well as police and other agencies. Vadim Redkin, a former drummer in a Soviet-era boyband who is known as Vissarion's right-hand man, was also arrested, along with another aide, Vladimir Vedernikov.

Torop, who lost his job as a traffic officer in 1989, claimed he experienced an "awakening" as the Soviet regime began to collapse. In 1991 he founded a movement now known as the Church of the Last Testament.

Several thousand followers live in a series of remote hamlets in the Krasnoyarsk region in Siberia. Converts to the cult have included professionals from across Russia as well as pilgrims from abroad.

"I am not God. And it is a mistake to see Jesus as God. But I am the living word of God the father. Everything that God wants to say, he says through me," Vissarion told the Guardian in 2002.

Russian media reported that in the original ideology of the cult, Vissarion claimed Jesus was watching over people from an orbit close to Earth, and the Virgin Mary was "running Russia", but later he declared himself to be Jesus.

His commune mixes a selection of rites drawn from Orthodox Christianity with environmental edicts and a series of other rules. Veganism is enforced and monetary exchange is banned inside the commune. Followers wear austere clothing and count years starting from 1961, the year of Vissarion's birth, while Christmas has been replaced by a feast day on 14 January, his birthday.

It is not clear what will happen to the disciples now that their leader has been arrested, nor is it clear why authorities decided to move now. The official Russian Orthodox church has long condemned the group but officials have largely left the devotees alone. Some

Russian media outlets reported that the community had become involved in a dispute with local business interests.

Special bimonthly FORB Digest (02-15.09.2020)

15.09.20 - Danish Jehovah's Witness returned to punishment cell

Link to full text in Russian: www.zaprava.ru/svidetelya-iegovy-dennisa-kristensena-snova-otpravili-v-shizo-2/

The Jehovah's Witness (organization ruled to be extremist in R.F.) Dennis Christensen, who was convicted of extremism and is serving his punishment in the Lgov correctional penal colony No. 3 (Kursk oblast), was again put into the punishment cell (Shtrafnoi IZOLIator—ShIZO).

[Continue reading...](#)

11.09.20 - In the city of Primorye, the trial of a 72-year-old believer is drawing to a conclusion. Being disabled, she commutes to court hearings using her crutches

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2020/09/6.html>

Lyudmila Shut from Razdolnoye village (Primorye Territory) is being tried for her faith under the article on participation in the extremist organization's activities.

[Continue reading...](#)

10.09.20 - Court recommends excommunication of conservative Orthodox monk

Link to full text in Russian: www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=dujour&div=447

The court of the Ekaterinburg diocese on Thursday adopted the decision to send a recommendation concerning expulsion from the church of schema monk Sergius Romanov, who has been stripped of his clerical status, Archpriest Nikolai Maleta, chairman of the court, told journalists.

[Continue reading...](#)

10.09.20 - A believer from Beryozovsky, was handed a two and a half year suspended sentence for participating in meetings with fellow believers

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2020/09/5.html>

On September 10, 2020, the Berezovsky City Court of Kemerovo region handed a guilty verdict to Hasan Kogut, a 37-year-old father of a minor child.

[Continue reading...](#)

09.09.20 - Controversy about takeover of movie house by Siberian protestants

Link to full text in Russian: <https://www.kem.kp.ru/daily/author/816428/>

On social networks a stormy discussion is under way: what will be in the movie theatre "Sibir"? According to unofficial information, a church will be here.

[Continue reading...](#)

08.09.20 - Jehovah's Witness jailed for fear he might mess up investigation

Link to full text in Russian: <https://www.zaprava.ru/v-severske-vzyat-pod-strazhu-50-letnij-svidtel-iegovy/>

The Seversk city court of Tomsk oblast ordered to take into custody the fifty-year-old Jehovah's Witness (the organization is considered extremist in the R.F.) Evgeny Korotun. As the website of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia reports, the believer was taken into custody at yesterday's judicial session.

[Continue reading...](#)

07.09.20 - Attorneys mobilize to defend rights of religious groups

Link to full text in Russian: http://www.sclj.ru/news/list.php?SECTION_ID=415

In late August 2020, lawyers and experts visited Krasnodar territory, which is the second region within the context of the Svoboda28 project organized by the Slavic Legal Center along with the Institute of the Rule of Law, with informational support of the publication *Religiia i Pravo* and the SPEKTR News Bureau.

[Continue reading...](#)

05.09.20 - Prosecutor frustrates hope for freedom for Jehovah's Witness Dennis Christensen

Link to full text in Russian: <https://kursk-izvestia.ru/news/160486/>

Materials of the criminal case have been sent for a new review in Lgov district court with a different composition.

We recall that earlier the Zheleznodorozhny district court in the city of Orel found Dennis Christensen guilty of arranging the activity of the religious congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses (activity forbidden in Russia).

[Continue reading...](#)

05.09.20 - Court in Kursk leaves Jehovah's Witness Dennis Christensen in penal colony.

Link to full text in Russian: <https://vestivrn.ru/news/2020/09/04/zaderzhannykh-za-ekstremizm-svidetelei-iegovy-ostavili-v-voronezhskom-sizo-do-dekabrya/>

The Lenin district court extended the detention of eight Jehovah's Witnesses by three months; they were arrested in July on suspicion of extremism. Members of the organization, including leaders in the main, will remain in the SIZO [pretrial investigation cell] at least until 3 December. This was explained for a Vesti Voronezh correspondent in the press service of the court.

[Continue reading...](#)

04.09.20 - Long pretrial detention of Voronezh Jehovah's Witnesses

Link to full text in Russian: <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/4481721>

The Lenin district court of Voronezh extended the detention of eight local members of the Jehovah's Witnesses (an organization ruled to be extremist in the R.F.). As "De Facto Voronezh" reports, for two believers the measure of restriction was extended until 2 December and for six, until the third.

[Continue reading...](#)

04.09.20 - Novozybkov Court sentenced 4 Jehovah's Witnesses to jail, but released them because they have already served their time

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2020/09/3.html>

On September 3, 2020, the [Novozybkov City Court sentenced](#) Vladimir Khokhlov and Eduard Zhinzhikov to 1 year and 3 months of imprisonment and 1 year of restraint, and Tatyana Shamsheva and Olga Silaeva to 1 year of imprisonment and 6 months of restraint.

[Continue reading...](#)

02.09.20 - Two Jehovah's Witnesses given four years prison time

Link to full text in Russian: <https://tayga.info/158978>

A court sentenced two Jehovah's Witnesses in Kuzbass to four years in a prison colony for participation in the activity of an extremist organization. One of the believers is an invalid, second class.

[Continue reading...](#)

Opposition to Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia: Legal measures

***Vilnius University seminar
Jehovah's Witnesses and Their Opponents: Russia, the West, and Beyond***

3 September 2020

By Willy Fautré, *Human Rights Without Frontiers*

HRWF (03.09.2020) - As of 15 August, 44 Jehovah's Witnesses were in prison in Russia: 10 had been convicted and 34 were in pretrial detention. Additionally, 173 Jehovah's Witnesses were under orders forbidding them from leaving their hometown and 379 were under criminal investigation. These individuals ranged in age from 19 to 90 years old.

Why are so many Jehovah's Witnesses being put behind bars in Russia? Worldwide, they are known to be law abiding citizens and to be non-violent. They may be imprisoned as conscientious objectors to military service or for their proselytizing activities in some countries, but this is not the case in Russia.

In Russia, they are accused of being **extremists**. Since April 2017, when the movement was banned by the Supreme Court, 1107 of their homes have been raided, including 310 in 2020. These raids have continued even during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Dennis Christensen, a 46-year-old **Danish citizen** living in the Russian town of Oryol, was the **first Jehovah's Witness to be arrested** a few weeks after the ban. He was placed in pre-trial detention for a long period before being sentenced to **six years in prison**.

The acceleration and intensification of the persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia started with **the ban of their movement on 20 April 2017 on grounds of alleged extremism**.

The ban on grounds of extremism

On that day, Russia's Supreme Court ruled that **the Jehovah's Witnesses' national headquarters in St Petersburg and all local branches were "extremist", and thus should be closed and immediately stop all activities. Additionally, the Supreme Court ordered all of their property to be seized by the state.**

The Jehovah's Witness Administrative Centre appealed the decision but, on 17 July 2017, Russia's Supreme Court upheld its earlier ruling **to liquidate the Administrative Centre and its 395 local legal entities, as well as to ban all activities and seize all properties**. It is estimated that these properties are worth **over 125 million USD**.

The ruling immediately entered into force but although it did not, **in theory**, suppress the freedom of worship of Jehovah's Witnesses, their religious activities carried out either individually or collectively were afterwards labelled '**extremist' and criminalised in practice**. The arrest and lengthy prison sentencing of Dennis Christensen was a strong warning to Jehovah's Witnesses and the international human rights community: **the law would be strictly and firmly implemented**.

Dennis Christensen, six years in prison

After nearly a year-long criminal trial with over **50 court appearances**, Dennis Christensen was sentenced to **six years' imprisonment for allegedly "organizing extremist activities of a banned organization"**. The Oryol community of Dennis Christensen was specifically targeted because the Oryol Regional Court had previously ruled their group to be "**extremist**".

On 23 June 2020, Christensen was [granted parole](#) after serving half of his prison sentence. However, the Kursk Regional Public Prosecutor's Office blocked his release request. The prison authorities then placed Christensen in a punishment cell for ten days

for alleged minor violations of prison rules despite his poor health. **He is still in prison right now.**

The accusations of extremism

The accusations of extremism against Jehovah's Witnesses are not new.

According to statistics from Russia's Justice Ministry, during the period 2007-2017 local courts had banned **at least eight Jehovah's Witnesses organizations** on the basis of the 2002 **law against extremism**, as well as **95 pieces of Jehovah's Witnesses' literature**. In most cases where publications were deemed extremist, the justification was that this literature allegedly claimed their interpretation of the Bible was superior to other Christian religions. This was considered a sign of extremism.

Extremism without violence

A turning point in Russia's anti-extremism strategy was when **an amendment was passed in 2006 that removed the necessity for violators of the law to be associated with violence or calls to violence.**

This amendment to the anti-extremism law opened the door to arbitrary and unrestrained interpretations of the concept of extremism. It has led to the criminalisation of freedom of thought, expression, worship, and assembly, as well as to police raids, fabricated charges, arrests and sentencing of members of peaceful groups such as Jehovah's Witnesses.

The emergence of the concept of 'spiritual security'

The persecution of non-Orthodox minorities of foreign origin, or without **"historical" roots** in Russia, is based on the political philosophy of **"spiritual security"**. This concept is promoted by the Kremlin and the Russian Orthodox Church with the support of far-right nationalist, xenophobic and anti-American movements.

In his 2000 National Security Concept, Russian President Vladimir Putin stated that "protection of the cultural, spiritual and moral legacy, historical traditions and the norms of social life" was a matter of national security. He also argued for "a state policy to maintain the population's spiritual and moral welfare, and to counter the adverse impact of foreign religious organizations and missionaries".

The developments that ensued soon stifled the principles of liberalism established in the very first years of the post-Soviet period.

The progressive 1990 Law on Freedom of Worship adopted by Russia under President Mikhail Gorbachev attracted large numbers of American and European Protestant missionaries who believed that the former Soviet Union would be a vast new territory for missionary work. This development raised the wrath of the Russian Orthodox Church.

A new law was necessary to end the perceived "invasion" by Protestant and other American "cults" who were portrayed by the Russian Orthodox Church as threatening the national identity. To this end, the Orthodox Church and the anti-cult movement led by **Alexander Dvorkin** intensely lobbied the Russian Parliament. They mobilised conservative segments of society to replace the liberal 1990 law with a new one aligning with their agenda. They won this first legal battle when President Boris Yeltsin passed the **1997 Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious**

Associations, which differentiated between traditional and non-traditional religions in Russia.

Since then, the concept of "spiritual security" as part of national security has been developed and instrumentalised by the ruling authorities and the judiciary to restrict the rights of non-Orthodox religious minorities of foreign origin and to criminalise their beliefs, teachings, religious publications and peaceful activities .

The spiritual security concept and the scapegoating of "foreign agents"

However, the notion of "spiritual security" is part of a much broader security context in Russia.

On 20 July 2012, Putin signed a bill into law that required independent groups to register as "**foreign agents**" if they received any foreign funding and engaged in "political activity".

Consequently, Russian NGOs and Russia-based NGOs that received funding from the European Union (EU), the United States (US), and American or European foundations were infamously labelled "foreign agents" by Moscow. This law was justified by the assertion that so-called "foreign agents" are a threat to the Russian identity, national Orthodox values, social and religious cohesion and national security.

The label "foreign agent" breathed new life into the old Soviet accusation of espionage that still finds hold in the minds of the older Russian generation and acts as **a synonym for "spy" or "traitor"**.

In this context of 'foreign agent' hunting, Jehovah's Witnesses, a movement coming from the United States and having its headquarters in that country, became a priority target as they spread on historically canonical Slavic lands with a theology challenging the message of the Orthodox Church.

In the meantime, the amended anti-extremism laws had been purged from its fundamental element of violence and could be used against them.

The Russian Orthodox Church united with the Kremlin against Jehovah's Witnesses

In all of the Russian Orthodox Church's press releases concerning the 2017 ban and subsequent arrests of Jehovah's Witnesses, the egregious violations of religious freedom or misuse of the anti-extremism legislation has **never been raised as such**. In fact, it's been the opposite, with the Church publicly announcing its support of the ban.

On 20 April 2017, Interfax-Religion titled a press release: "Russian Supreme Court declares Russian branch of Jehovah's Witnesses extremist organization, orders its closure".

On 2 May 2017, Interfax-Religion confirmed the position of the Church with a press release titled: "Russian Orthodox Church supports ban on Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia".

On 13 February 2019, the Russian Orthodox Church reiterated its full support for the ban with a press release titled: "Russian courts' ban on Jehovah's Witnesses founded - Justice Ministry".

The destructive role of Alexander Dvorkin and his anti-cult organisations

The banning of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia was a great victory for Orthodox anti-cult organisations and, in particular, **Alexander Dvorkin** who is the main and emblematic **anti-cult crusader** in Russia.

After returning in the early 1990s to Russia from the US where he was influenced by the American anti-cult movement, Dvorkin has been fighting against Jehovah's Witnesses for over two decades. His stance aligns with Orthodox values dear to Patriarch Kirill and the spiritual security concept dear to President Putin. Dvorkin was outspoken about this perceived victory in RIA Novosti news and on the TV Channel Sputnik a few weeks after the decision.

Conclusions

The fight for religious freedom in Russia has a long way to go. The US is leading the way by exposing President Putin's persecution agenda against Jehovah's Witnesses and other so-called "non-historical" religious movements. The US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) has made a number of recommendations to the US government calling for **sanctions that include the Russian anti-cult movement and their mentor, Alexander Dvorkin, but also the FECRIS international anti-cult movement he has been the vice-president of for years.**

The EU has its own system of targeted sanctions that could be activated. The United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Denmark, Italy and other democratic countries have mechanisms designed to defend freedom of religion or belief around the world and to adopt sanctions, if necessary.

Lastly, Jehovah's Witnesses themselves defend the right to freedom of religion for their members in Russian courts, at the European Court of Human Rights, the United Nations and the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe. This movement survived Nazi ideology. It survived 70 years of Communism in Russia. It is safe to assume that it will also survive the persecution of Putin's regime **backed by the Russian Orthodox Church and Dvorkin**, but it will be a long battle.

Two Jehovah's Witnesses sentenced to four years in prison

HRWF (02.09.2020) - Today, the Berezovsky City Court of the Kemerovo Region sentenced two Jehovah's Witnesses, 55-year-old Sergey Britvin and 48-year-old Vadim Levchuk, to four years in prison. The prosecution had asked for six and a half years. The men will appeal their conviction.

Jarrold Lopes, spokesman for Jehovah's Witnesses, states: "Today, Judge Irina Vorobieva sentenced Sergey and Vadim to four years in prison. Such a sentence is patently absurd, especially when you consider that conviction for kidnapping in Russia carries a maximum of five years; and rape, three to six. Human right bodies from the EU, U.K., U.S., and the UN have repeatedly called on Russia to stop the systematic persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses. Yet, Russian authorities have persisted, raiding over 330 homes of Jehovah's Witnesses already this year. Undeterred even by COVID-19, Russia continues to subject peaceful family men like Sergey and Vadim to the unsanitary and potentially deadly confines of prison."

How did this happen?

- Both were detained on July 22, 2018, after Federal Security Service (FSB) agents raided eight homes of Jehovah's Witnesses in the city of Berezovsky
- Central District Court of Kemerovo ordered both to be held in pretrial detention. They remained in detention for nearly a year and a half
- On December 25, 2019, the men were transferred to house arrest, where they remained until today's conviction

Nationwide Persecution (Russia and Crimea)

384 under criminal investigation

46 in prison (10 convicted; 36 pretrial detention; over 190 have served time in pretrial detention)

29 under house arrest

1130 homes raided since 2017 Supreme Court ruling

Special bimonthly FORB Digest (16.08-02.09.2020)

02.09.20- The first convictions in Kemerovo Region have been handed down to two of Jehovah's Witnesses.

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2020/09/2.html>

On September 2, 2020, the 14-month [court proceedings against Jehovah's Witnesses Sergey Britvin and Vadim Levchuk](#) in the town of Beryozovsky came to a conclusion.

[Continue reading...](#)

28.08.20- Kursk regional court to rule on September 4 whether Dennis Christensen can be set free in exchange for a large fine

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2020/08/9.html>

On September 4, 2020 at 16:00, the Kursk Regional Court will consider the prosecutor's appeal against the [decision of](#) the Lgov District Court to replace Dennis Christensen with a fine of 400,000 rubles.

[Continue reading...](#)

28.08.20- Judge shields Jehovah's Witness from additional examination

Link to full text in Russian: <https://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/353542/>

The Maisky district court did not satisfy the request of the state's prosecutor to order a new expert analysis in the case of Jehovah's Witness Yury Zalipaev and it scheduled the debates of the sides for 18 September, lawyer Anton Omelchenko reported.

[Continue reading...](#)

28.08.20- Thirty European nations condemned the persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2020/08/8.html>

On 23 July 2020, at a meeting of the Permanent Council of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), 30 member States issued a statement strongly criticizing the repression of Jehovah's Witnesses by the Russian authorities.

[Continue reading...](#)

26.08.20- Orthodox activist fined for criticizing lockdown of churches in Russia

Link to full text in Russian: <https://www.idelreal.org/a/30803889.html>

During the "self-isolation phase" in Tatarstan, Mikhail Shcheglov sent to the president of Tatarstan a request to permit Orthodox residents of the republic to attend churches during the religious holidays.

[Continue reading...](#)

26.08.20- Expert opinion defends Jehovah's Witness in criminal trial

Link to full text in Russian: <https://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/353470/>

At the court session in the case of the Jehovah's Witness Yury Zalipaev from Maisky, the state's prosecutor filed a petition to order for this case yet another expert analysis, and the defense spoke out against it, the lawyer Anton Omelchenko reported.

[Continue reading...](#)

24.08.20- Why are peace-loving individuals being framed as criminals? An engineer is being tried for his faith in the city of Krasnoyarsk

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2020/08/7.html>

In Krasnoyarsk, District Court has begun consideration of the [criminal case](#) against Andrey Stupnikov, a peaceful believer accused of extremism. Who he is and why he is being tried, is described in a 4-minute video.

[Continue reading...](#)

21.08.20- Russia holds church accountable for coronavirus infections

Link to full text in Russian: <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=75563>

The Orthodox parish of the village of Ishparsovo in Bashkiriya was fined 200,000 rubles for an outbreak of coronavirus. A city court of Sterlitamak issued an order concerning this.

[Continue reading...](#)

20.08.20- Human rights center publicizes case of Jehovah's Witness believer

Link to full text in Russian: https://memohrc.org/ru/news_old/v-kemerovskoy-oblasti-prokuratura-zaprosila-dlya-svidetelya-iegovy-dva-goda-kolonii

On 18 August, in the debates in Berezovskii city court of Kemerovo oblast, the prosecution asked for two years in a penal colony of general regime for Jehovah's Witness Khasan Kogut. This is reported by Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia.

[Continue reading...](#)

20.08.20- More Jehovah's Witnesses arrested in ethnic region of western Siberia

Link to full text in Russian: <https://iz.ru/1050460/2020-08-20/v-khmao-zaderzhali-adeptov-svidetelei-iegovy>

In Yugorsk in the Khanty-Mansi autonomous okrug [Kh.M.A.O.], a case against two residents suspected of arranging the activity of a religious cell of Jehovah's Witnesses, whose activity is forbidden on Russian territory, was opened.

[Continue reading...](#)

19.08.20- Law enforcers once again search the homes of believers in the Yugra region.

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2020/08/6.html>

In the morning of August 19, 2020, law enforcers invaded at least four dwellings of Jehovah's Witnesses in the towns of Ugorsk and the neighboring Sovetskiy. No information about the detainees had been received so far.

[Continue reading...](#)

Russian Evangelicals fined for 'missionary activity' during pandemic

Offenses include passing out tracts and telling people to invite friends to hear the gospel.

By Daniel Silliman

Christianity Today (26.08.2020) - <https://bit.ly/31IfsYT> - Anatoly Chendemerov was handing out tracts that said "You must be born again!" in the Volga Federal District in southeastern Russia. He was fined 6,000 rubles, the equivalent of about \$80.

Sergey Krasnov was passing out Christian newspapers and New Testaments in Krasnodar, a city in the South. He was fined 5,000 rubles, or about \$65.

Seo Jin Wook, a South Korean, met with about 10 people in a private home in Izhevsk, in the Western Ural Mountains, to talk about the good news of Jesus Christ. He told the

people they should come back and bring friends. He was fined 30,000 rubles (about \$400) and deported.

In the first six months of 2020, more than 40 people have been punished for violating a Russian anti-missionary law, according to a new report from Forum 18, a religious liberty news service based in Norway. Government lockdowns and pandemic stay-at-home orders did not substantially slow the multiyear crackdown on unauthorized religious activity.

Russia passed a 2015 law that said all religious meeting places needed to be registered. That regulation was followed in 2016 with an anti-missionary law. The bill was labeled as anti-terrorism legislation, meant to prevent foreign extremists from exerting influence in the country. At the time, religious liberty experts said it was hard to predict how the law would be applied and what activity would be prohibited.

"It is broad and vaguely defined," wrote Travis Wussow, of the Southern Baptist's Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, in 2016. "Of course, limiting expression and freedom in a vague way is a tried-and-true tool of regimes to stifle speech beyond the language of the law by creating fear of punishment."

Four years later, the application of the law is clear. Local police, sometimes supported by the Federal Security Service, have fined roughly 100 religious people per year for practicing their faith. Baptists distributing tracts and Muslims teaching people the language skills necessary to read the Qur'an are prime targets, alongside ongoing efforts to completely rid the country of Jehovah's Witnesses.

So far in 2020, local police have fined a dozen Muslim men for teaching Arabic grammar, according to Forum 18. They have also fined a sectarian Roman Catholic performing a Latin Mass, a Pentecostal holding services in his home, and a dozen Baptists distributing religious literature. Seventy percent of Russians are Orthodox, though only about five percent go to church regularly. Seven percent of people are Muslim and about 2 percent are Protestant—mainly Baptist and Pentecostal.

While the government has been targeting evangelical Christians, the Russian constitution was also amended to include a reference to God, define marriage as a union between one man and one woman, and allow President Vladimir Putin to remain in power beyond his fourth term, which ends in 2024. The Russian legislature is also considering a law limiting religious liberty to Russian citizens and permanent residents, banning non-residents from practicing their faith in the country and preventing Russian religious leaders from receiving theological education abroad.

Putin has raised the status of the Russian Orthodox Church in his fourth term and talked about the need to stand strong against secularism and the "chaotic darkness" of the West, which he says is "denying moral principles and all traditional identities: national, cultural, religious, and even sexual." That political program includes clamping down on "foreign religions," such as Baptists.

"There is a sophisticated narrative ... that Russian society and culture are under siege," Eric Patterson, a scholar in the Robertson School of Government at Regent University, wrote for the conservative website The Blaze, "and that Russia is fortunate to have the bold, determined leadership of Vladimir Putin and his United Russia party to stand up against all forms of foreign influence and aggression."

The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom has recommended targeted sanctions in response to the violations of religious liberty.

Misuse of anti-extremism in July 2020

Sova Center (21.08.2020) - <https://bit.ly/3jq9Msg> - Latest report about the misuse of the extremism legislation against Falun Gong practitioners, Muslims and Jehovah's Witnesses.

Falun Gong

In late July, the Supreme Court of the Republic of Khakassia dismissed the claim of the republican prosecutor's office to liquidate and recognize as extremist Khakassian Regional Public Organization for Spiritual and Physical Self-Improvement of a Person under the Great Falun Law "Falun Dafa." Falun Dafa new religious movement is built around the practice of qigong gymnastics in combination with elements of Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism. It has been banned and persecuted in China, and its followers abroad sharply criticize the Chinese authorities. The Khakassian organization was accused of trying to disseminate Zhuan Falun, – a treatise by Falun Dafa (Falun Gong) founder Li Hongzhi declared extremist in 2011. According to the Falun Gong practitioners, the Khakassian Falun Dafa organization, founded in 2006, ceased its operations in 2017, and have tried to notify the state authorities about it. Zhuan Falun was recognized as extremist on the grounds that it allegedly advocated the superiority of the adherents of Falun Gong ideology over other people. In our opinion, propaganda of the truth of one's own convictions cannot be regarded as incitement to hatred, and the book does not contain any calls for violence, therefore the ban against it and prosecution for its distribution are inappropriate. We welcome the court's decision not to ban the organization, but would like to remind that Falun Dafa practitioners may face renewed persecution, since, in July, the activities of the movement's seven foreign and international organizations were deemed undesirable on the Russian territory.

Muslims

In July, we learned about two earlier sentences for involvement in the Islamic radical party Hizb ut-Tahrir, which has been recognized as terrorist in Russia. On March 11, 2020, the Central District Military Court in Yekaterinburg sentenced Ildar Akhmetzyanov, a resident of Chistopol, to 17 years in a maximum security colony under Article 205.5 Part 1 of the Criminal Code (organizing the activities of a terrorist organization). Akhmetzyanov is appealing against the verdict. On May 13, 2020, the same court sentenced Rais Gimadiev under the same article; he received 16 years in a maximum security colony. Akhmetzyanov and Gimadiev, along with previously convicted Eduard Nizamov, were accused of involving Muslims in the ranks of Hizb ut-Tahrir, as well as creating an underground network structure in Russia and facilitating the replenishment of military formations operating in the Middle East. As far as we know, Hizb ut-Tahrir does not resort to terrorist methods of struggle and does not participate in the recruitment of personnel to participate in hostilities in the Middle East. Therefore, we consider prosecution against the party followers under "terrorist articles" merely on the basis of their party activity (holding meetings, reading literature, etc.) inappropriate.

In early July, seven Muslims were detained in Crimea after a series of search raids. The arrests were carried out as part of the yet another investigation under Article 205.5 Part 1 and 2 of the Criminal Code (organizing the activities of or participation in a terrorist organization). Ismet Ibragimov and Vadim Bektemirov were detained near Simferopol, Emil Ziyadinov in the village of Oktyabrsky, Seyran Khairtdinov, Alim Sufianov and Alexander Sizikov (a sight-disabled person) in the Bakhchisarai region, and Zekirya Muratov in Alushta. In Alushta, the authorities also searched the house of Diliaver Memetov, but he was not at home at the time, and was put on the wanted list. The FSB reported that prohibited materials by Hizb ut-Tahrir had been confiscated during searches, while the detainees' relatives reported that the materials had been planted.

Sizikov was placed under house arrest; the others were sent to a pre-trial detention center.

On the last day of the month, the FSB, Federal National Guard (Rosgvardia) and the Ministry of Internal Affairs reported on the detention of six alleged supporters of the Tablighi Jamaat movement, banned in Russia. They were detained for investigation in the case under Article 282.2 Part 1 of the Criminal Code (organizing the activities of an extremist organization). Tablighi Jamaat was banned in Russia in 2009 – in our opinion, without proper justification. This association is engaged in propaganda of fundamentalist Islam, but was never known to call for violence, and therefore, the persecution of its supporters, from our point of view, is inappropriate.

Jehovah's Witnesses

The Furmanov City Court of the Ivanovo Region found 34-year-old Yevgeny Spirin guilty of organizing the activities of an extremist organization under Article 282.2 Part 1 of the Criminal Code and sentenced him to a fine of 500 thousand rubles in late July. According to the investigation, Spirin organized and conducted meetings of the local community and talked with residents of the Ivanovo Region about religion in order to promote the activities of this organization. The prosecutor asked for a sentence of seven years in prison. We would like to remind that we regard as inappropriate both the prohibition of Jehovah's Witnesses organizations in Russia as extremist and the persecution against believers for continuing the activities of their communities.

In July, we learned about a number of new cases of persecution against Jehovah's Witnesses.

Back in late June, the FSB of Russia for the Krasnodar Territory opened two new cases under Article 282.2 Part 2 of the Criminal Code (participation in the activities of an extremist organization) against Vladimir Skachidub and Maxim Beltikov from the village of Pavlovskaya; according to the investigation, they acted as preachers. They were put under travel restrictions.

In early July, six believers in Vladivostok, who served as witnesses in the case of Elena Barmakina, were put on the Rosfinmonitoring list. Five women and one man between the ages of 29 and 60 were put on the list of persons involved in extremist or terrorist activities: Nina Astvatsaturova, Roman Verigin, Violetta Verigina, Ludviga Katanaeva, Eva Katanaeva and Elena Tsorn; their houses were later searched. At least five detainees became suspects in the case. Nina Astvatsaturova was charged under Article 282.2 Part 2 of the Criminal Code.

A criminal case was opened in Kaliningrad, in which Mikhail Kopytov became a defendant, and searches were carried out in the homes of local Jehovah's Witnesses. 12 people were detained and interrogated.

A series of search raids took place in Prokopyevsk of the Kemerovo Region under the auspices of a criminal investigation under Article 282.2 Part 1 of the Criminal Code; Andrei Vlasov and Viktor Mikhnyuk were interrogated. Vlasov was placed under house arrest.

In mid-July, as part of the investigation in the Voronezh Region of two criminal cases under Article 282.2 Part 1 of the Criminal Code related to the activities of a local banned community, searches were carried out in at least 110 homes of Jehovah's Witnesses. At least 14 people were questioned. Two believers reported severe beatings for their refusals to share their smartphone passwords. Later, another detainee reported that he had been tortured during interrogation in the regional department of the Ministry of

Internal Affairs – they had beaten him in the face and put a plastic bag over his head, demanding to name the elders of the community. Alexey Antyukhin, Sergey Baev, Mikhail Veselov, Yuri Galka, Valery Gursky, Vitaly Nerush, Stepan Pankratov, Igor Popov, Evgeny Sokolov and Anatoly Yagupov became suspects in the case. All ten of them were arrested.

Searches took place at five Jehovah's Witnesses' addresses in Seversk of the Tomsk Region, as part of a criminal investigation under Article 282.2 Part 1 of the Criminal Code. Nine people were taken for interrogation and then released; one of the believers, Sergei Korotun, was placed under house arrest.

In Solikamsk of Perm Krai, searches were conducted at three Jehovah's Witnesses' addresses; six people were detained. Two suspects, Vladimir Timoshkin and Vladimir Poltoradnev, were placed under house arrest, and another believer was banned from certain activities.

42 known "missionary activity" prosecutions in first half of 2020 – list

Forum 18 has found 42 prosecutions in the first half of 2020 (2 of organisations and 40 of individuals) for violating Russia's July 2016 Administrative Code Article 5.26, Parts 4 and 5, which punish "illegal missionary activity". 36 of the prosecutions resulted in initial convictions, all being punished with fines (though a few were overturned on appeal). The first half of 2020 saw a conviction rate of 92 per cent. Two foreigners were ordered deported.

By Victoria Arnold

Forum 18 (21.08.2020) - <https://bit.ly/3gwiKm2> - Between the beginning of January and the end of June 2020, there were at least 42 prosecutions under Administrative Code Article 5.26, Part 4 ("Russians conducting missionary activity") and Part 5 ("Foreigners conducting missionary activity"), according to Forum 18's analysis of available court records.

Overall, figures for 2019 and the first half of 2020 are roughly similar to 2018, when there were 105 such known cases, but this 18-month period has seen a shift towards more prosecutions for Muslim religious activities, and the first known prosecutions of Catholic and Methodist individuals and organisations.

Forum 18 found slightly fewer cases reaching court between January and June 2020 than might be expected (the 42 prosecutions listed derive from only 25 investigations); this is likely because of the restrictions imposed on court functions during Russia's coronavirus lockdown period.

Of the 42 cases known to have reached court so far in 2020, two involved organisations and 40 individuals. Thirty-six resulted in conviction and three in acquittal, while judges closed or sent back three cases. The first half of 2020 therefore saw a conviction rate (for those cases which reached a verdict) of 92.3 per cent. All those convicted received fines, though a few of these were later overturned on appeal.

Of the four foreigners charged under Article 5.26, Part 5 ("Foreigners conducting missionary activity"), two were ordered deported by means of enforced expulsion (meaning that they were sent to Interior Ministry detention centres for foreign nationals before departure).

One man – Tajik citizen Fayzali Kholmurodov – is believed to be still in detention six months after his conviction in February 2020, as Tajikistan's borders remain closed because of the coronavirus pandemic (see below).

(See here for a full list of the 100 known prosecutions in 2019, based on court decisions and other information.)

Russia has also imposed its "anti-missionary" legislation in Crimea, which it annexed in 2014. At least 24 prosecutions under Article 5.26, Part 4 are known to have been launched in 2019, of which 17 ended with punishment.

These prosecutions are based on amendments to the Administrative Code and Religion Law introduced in July 2016 as part of the "Yarovaya" package of "anti-terrorism" laws.

Religious organisations may also be prosecuted under Article 5.26, Part 3 ("Implementation of activities by a religious organisation without indicating its official full name, including the issuing or distribution, within the framework of missionary activity, of literature and printed, audio, and video material without a label bearing this name, or with an incomplete or deliberately false label" – see forthcoming F18News article).

List of known prosecutions in the first half of 2020

All prosecutions under Administrative Code Article 5.26, Part 4 ("Russians conducting missionary activity") and Part 5 ("Foreigners conducting missionary activity") known to have reached court in the first half of 2020 are listed below, ordered by date of court hearing. The list is based on court decisions and court records seen by Forum 18, and other information.

A fine of 50,000 Roubles (6,100 Norwegian Kroner, 575 Euros or 675 US Dollars) represents nearly six weeks' average wages for those in work or 16 weeks' average state retirement pension.

1) 15 January 2020

Name: Gumer Moflyukhunov

Punishment: 5,000 Roubles

Court: Almetyevsk District Magistrate's Court No. 6, Republic of Tatarstan

Circumstances: Muslim charged for leading prayers in a mosque without authorisation from the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Tatarstan to perform missionary activity, and without official position at the mosque; case brought by police

Appeal: unsuccessful – 25 May 2020, Almetyevsk City Court, Republic of Tatarstan

2) 16 January 2020

Name: Anatoly Chipilka

Punishment: 5,000 Roubles

Court: Abinsk District Magistrate's Court No. 114, Krasnodar Region

Circumstances: leader of Council of Churches Baptist religious group charged for carrying out unspecified missionary activity without submitting notification to the Justice Ministry of the existence of the religious group

Appeal: unsuccessful – 4 March 2020, Abinsk District Court, Krasnodar Region

3) 16 January 2020

Name: Lyudmila Akimenko

Punishment: 5,000 Roubles

Court: Kuvandyk and Kuvandyk District Magistrate's Court No. 2, Orenburg Region
Circumstances: same case as Kistanova – see below; Baptist charged for distributing religious literature to passers-by in the street without authorisation from a religious group or notification to the Justice Ministry of the existence of a religious group
Appeal: unsuccessful – 20 March 2020, Kuvandyk District Court, Orenburg Region; supervisory, unsuccessful – 27 July 2020, 6th Cassational Court, Samara

4) 16 January 2020

Name: Pavel Galaktionov
Punishment: 5,000 Roubles
Court: Kasly and Kasly District Magistrate's Court No. 1, Chelyabinsk Region
Circumstances: Council of Churches Baptist charged for distributing the newspaper "Do you believe?" to passers-by
Appeal: unsuccessful – 26 February 2020, Kasly City Court, Chelyabinsk Region

5) 20 January 2020

Name: Sergey Krasnov
Punishment: 5,000 Roubles
Court: Karasunsky District Magistrate's Court No. 36, Krasnodar
Circumstances: with Dmitry Korovin (see below), Council of Churches Baptist charged for handing out the newspaper "Do you believe?", magazines, and copies of the New Testament at an intersection in Krasnodar, without notification to the Justice Ministry of the existence of a religious group, and "having conversations with passers-by, with the aim of disseminating their beliefs among people of a different religion and involving them in their faith"; case brought after a man approached and asked where services were held, then introduced himself as an FSB security service officer and took the Baptists to a police station for questioning
Appeal: unsuccessful – 17 June 2020, Soviet District Court, Krasnodar

6) 22 January 2020

Name: Lyubov Kistanova
Punishment: 5,000 Roubles
Court: Kuvandyk and Kuvandyk District Magistrate's Court No. 2, Orenburg Region
Circumstances: same case as Akimenko – see above; Baptist charged for distributing religious literature to passers-by in the street without authorisation from a religious group or notification to the Justice Ministry of the existence of a religious group
Appeal: unsuccessful – 20 March 2020, Kuvandyk District Court, Orenburg Region; supervisory, unsuccessful – 6 July 2020, 6th Cassational Court, Samara

7) 23 January 2020

Name: Dmitry Korovin
Punishment: 5,000 Roubles
Court: Karasunsky District Magistrate's Court No. 36, Krasnodar
Circumstances: with Sergey Krasnov (see above), Council of Churches Baptist charged for handing out the newspaper "Do you believe?", magazines, and copies of the New Testament at an intersection in Krasnodar, without notification to the Justice Ministry of the existence of a religious group, and "having conversations with passers-by, with the aim of disseminating their beliefs among people of a different religion and involving them in their faith"; case brought after a man approached and asked where services were held, then introduced himself as an FSB security service officer and took the Baptists to a police station for questioning
Appeal: unsuccessful – 5 June 2020, Soviet District Court, Krasnodar

8) 23 January 2020

Name: Akhli-Beyt Scientific-Cultural Centre (Regional Public Organisation)

Punishment: none – acquitted

Court: Kalinin District Magistrate's Court No. 49, St Petersburg

Circumstances: same case as Mamedov – see below; after inspection by police, FSB security service, and Interior Ministry's Centre for Countering Extremism, Azerbaijani cultural centre charged for holding Muslim prayers on its premises

Appeal: none

9) 23 January 2020

Name: Rufat Mamedov

Punishment: none – acquitted

Court: Kalinin District Magistrate's Court No. 49, St Petersburg

Circumstances: Muslim (same case as Akhli-Beyt Scientific-Cultural Centre – see above)

Appeal: none

10) 27 January 2020

Name: G.I. Makiyev

Punishment: none – acquitted

Court: Maysky District Magistrate's Court No. 1, Republic of Kabardino-Balkariya

Circumstances: Baptist charged for distributing "Faith and Life" magazines in the property where he was doing building work, with a sign saying that anyone who wished could take one; defendant stated that he had no desire to involve people in any religious movement and had had no conversations with anyone; lawyer pointed out that the magazine contains articles by Orthodox, Protestant, and Catholic authors alike, as well as poetry, stories, art, and history; judge mentions the "defining feature" of missionary activity as laid out by the Constitutional Court, and notes that there is no evidence that defendant carried out (or aimed to carry out) activities aimed at disseminating information about any religion in a public place.

Appeal: none

11) 4 February 2020

Name: Vadim Yurchenko

Punishment: 5,000 Roubles

Court: Maykop Magistrate's Court No. 8, Republic of Adygeya

Circumstances: Protestant pastor charged after FSB security service inspection of local organisation of Russian Association of Evangelical Christians – details unknown

Appeal: unsuccessful – 27 February 2020, Maykop City Court, Republic of Adygeya

12) 10 February 2020

Name: G.R. Gaydarbekov

Punishment: 5,000 Roubles

Court: Kirov District Magistrate's Court No. 5, Makhachkala, Dagestan Republic

Circumstances: Muslim charged for giving lessons on Arabic grammar and how to read the Koran at a mosque without necessary documents from the religious organisation for missionary activity

Appeal: none yet

13) 10 February 2020

Name: B.A. Abdulkhalikov
Punishment: 5,000 Roubles
Court: Kirov District Magistrate's Court No. 5, Makhachkala, Dagestan Republic
Circumstances: Muslim charged for giving lessons on Arabic grammar and how to read the Koran at a mosque without necessary documents from the religious organisation for missionary activity
Appeal: none yet

14) 11 February 2020

Name: A.I. Kolov
Punishment: 5,000 Roubles
Court: Kirov District Magistrate's Court No. 5, Makhachkala, Dagestan Republic
Circumstances: Muslim charged for giving lessons on Arabic grammar and how to read the Koran at a mosque without necessary documents from the religious organisation for missionary activity
Appeal: none yet

15) 11 February 2020

Name: A.N. Atagadzhiev
Punishment: 5,000 Roubles
Court: Kirov District Magistrate's Court No. 5, Makhachkala, Dagestan Republic
Circumstances: Muslim charged for giving lessons on Arabic grammar and how to read the Koran at a mosque without necessary documents from the religious organisation for missionary activity
Appeal: none yet

16) 11 February 2020

Name: Konstantin Nazarov
Punishment: 5,000 Roubles
Court: Maykop Magistrate's Court No. 2, Republic of Adygeya
Circumstances: Protestant pastor of unregistered Christian Library church charged for carrying out missionary activity without submitting notification of the existence of a religious group, i.e. members of the church invited local residents to services; case brought by prosecutor's office on basis of information from FSB security service
Appeal: none yet

17) 12 February 2020

Name: Ilyas Arslanbekov
Punishment: 5,000 Roubles
Court: Kirov District Magistrate's Court No. 5, Makhachkala, Dagestan Republic
Circumstances: Muslim charged for giving lessons on Arabic grammar and how to read the Koran at a mosque without necessary documents from the religious organisation for missionary activity
Appeal: rejected without consideration – Kirov District Court, Makhachkala, Dagestan Republic

18) 12 February 2020

Name: Nikita Glazunov
Punishment: 5,000 Roubles
Court: Vakhitovsky District Magistrate's Court No. 8, Kazan, Republic of Tatarstan

Circumstances: leader of a traditionalist Catholic religious group, the Society of Saint Pius X, charged for organising Latin Mass in a hotel conference hall; Mass served by a "foreign preacher", invited by defendant, who did not have written authorisation from religious group to perform missionary activity; no lease on conference hall signed with hotel administration; witness testified that preacher had "spoken of the truth of Catholicism in comparison with Orthodox Christianity, and that, after the religious service, [defendant and another person] approached him and invited him to take printed materials to familiarise himself with their religious views"; case brought by prosecutor's office but also involved police

Appeal: unsuccessful – 5 June 2020, Vakhitovsky District Court, Kazan, Republic of Tatarstan

19) 12 February 2020

Name: Mukhammad Buttayev

Punishment: 5,000 Roubles

Court: Kirov District Magistrate's Court No. 5, Makhachkala, Dagestan Republic

Circumstances: Muslim charged for giving lessons on Arabic grammar and how to read the Koran at a mosque without necessary documents from the religious organisation for missionary activity

Appeal: rejected without consideration – 10 August 2020, Kirov District Court, Makhachkala, Dagestan Republic

20) 12 February 2020

Part 5

Name: Fayzali Kholmurodov

Punishment: 30,000 Roubles plus deportation (enforced expulsion – detention in the meantime)

Court: Donskoy City Court, Tula Region

Circumstances: Tajik citizen charged for leading Muslim prayers in a migrant workers' hostel, without submitting notification of the existence of a religious group and without authorisation from religious group to carry out missionary activity; case brought by police on basis of information from FSB security service

Appeal: none

21) 21 February 2020

Name: N.K. Kazimagomedov

Punishment: 5,000 Roubles

Court: Kirov District Magistrate's Court No. 5, Makhachkala, Dagestan Republic

Circumstances: Muslim charged for giving lessons on Arabic grammar and how to read the Koran at a mosque without necessary documents from the religious organisation for missionary activity

Appeal: none yet

22) 21 February 2020

Name: Magomed Isayev

Punishment: 5,000 Roubles

Court: Kirov District Magistrate's Court No. 5, Makhachkala, Dagestan Republic

Circumstances: Muslim charged for giving lessons on Arabic grammar and how to read the Koran at a mosque without necessary documents from the religious organisation for missionary activity

Appeal: lodged on 16 July 2020 at Kirov District Court, Makhachkala, Dagestan Republic – hearing on 30 July 2020 (outcome unknown)

23) 26 February 2020

Name: Anatoly Feoktistov

Punishment: 5,000 Roubles

Court: Verkhneuralsk District Magistrate's Court No. 1/2, Chelyabinsk Region

Circumstances: Pentecostal pastor charged for holding Sunday services on residential premises, without written authorisation from his religious group or notification to the Justice Ministry of a religious group's existence; defendant argued that he "does not campaign to attract new members, but does not refuse to talk with people who find themselves in difficult life situations, inviting them to come to meetings"; judge notes defendant's certificates attesting to his qualification as a "missionary"

Appeal: unsuccessful – 18 May 2020, Verkhneuralsk District Court, Chelyabinsk Region; supervisory, rejected without consideration – 24 July 2020, 7th Cassational Court, Chelyabinsk

24) 3 March 2020

Part 5

Name: En Min Li

Punishment: 30,000 Roubles

Court: Kirov District Court, Omsk

Circumstances: South Korean postgraduate student (Omsk State University) charged (as result of FSB security service investigation) with missionary activity on behalf of the unregistered South Korean Good News Mission church, i.e. reading the Bible with others and preaching in a rented flat, without written authorisation from a religious organisation or group (defendant stated that he possessed the document, but it was in South Korea), or notification to the Justice Ministry of the existence of a religious group; not ordered deported as this would be "an excessive and unjustified measure"

Appeal: none

25) 6 March 2020

Name: S.A. Abdulkhalikov

Punishment: none – statute of limitations

Court: Kirov District Magistrate's Court No. 5, Makhachkala, Dagestan Republic

Circumstances: Muslim charged for giving lessons on Arabic grammar and how to read the Koran at a mosque without necessary documents from the religious organisation for missionary activity

Appeal: none

26) 23 March 2020

Name: U.M. Nazhmudinov

Punishment: 5,000 Roubles

Court: Botlikh District Magistrate's Court No. 111, Dagestan Republic

Circumstances: same case as Abdulayeva and Nazhmudinova – see below; Muslim charged for teaching Arabic, Koranic studies, handicrafts, and mental arithmetic, at the Centre for Children's Education, without either written authorisation from "the group" or notification to the Justice Ministry of its creation

Appeal: none yet

27) 25 March 2020

Name: U.O. Abdulayeva

Punishment: 5,000 Roubles

Court: Botlikh District Magistrate's Court No. 111, Dagestan Republic
Circumstances: same case as Nazhmudinov and Nazhmudinova – see above and below; Muslim charged for teaching Arabic, Koranic studies, handicrafts, and mental arithmetic, at the Centre for Children's Education, without either written authorisation from "the group" or notification to the Justice Ministry of its creation
Appeal: none yet

28) 25 March 2020

Name: Ayshat Nazhmudinova
Punishment: 5,000 Roubles
Court: Botlikh District Magistrate's Court No. 111, Dagestan Republic
Circumstances: same case as Nazhmudinov and Abdulayeva – see above; Muslim (director) charged for teaching Arabic, Koranic studies, handicrafts, and mental arithmetic, at the Centre for Children's Education, without either written authorisation from "the group" or notification to the Justice Ministry of its creation
Appeal: none yet

29) 8 April 2020

Name: Local Muslim Religious Organisation Mosque No. 650
Punishment: 50,000 Roubles
Court: Lenin District Magistrate's Court No. 6, Ulyanovsk
Circumstances: as result of FSB security service investigation, community charged for carrying out unspecified missionary activity in a building which was not registered and had not been brought into commission, and to which it had no property rights – as well as on residential premises elsewhere; lower-than-minimum fine imposed in light of community's financial position
Appeal: unsuccessful – 5 June 2020, Lenin District Court, Ulyanovsk

30) 13 April 2020

Name: N.S. Azizov
Punishment: none – case closed for unknown reasons
Court: Western City District Magistrate's Court No. 28, Krasnodar
Circumstances: unknown
Appeal: none

31) 14 April 2020

Part 5

Name: Seo Jin Wook
Punishment: 30,000 Roubles plus deportation (enforced expulsion – detention in the meantime)
Court: Pervomaysky District Court, Izhevsk, Udmurt Republic
Circumstances: South Korean citizen, pastor of Good News Mission Pentecostal church, charged for holding twice-weekly services for 10-12 people in a private home, without authorisation from a Russian religious organisation registered in Udmurtiya; also accused of calling on parishioners to bring new people into the church; case brought on basis of prosecutor's office inspection apparently based on information from FSB security service (church registered only in January 2020); defendant explained that he was in Russia for three months by private invitation, and argued that he had not conducted missionary activity, but only had conversations on religious topics with the guests of the house; judge noted that the house belonged to a private citizen and there was no formal agreement for use by a religious organisation.
Appeal: unsuccessful – 21 April 2020, Supreme Court of the Udmurt Republic

32) 21 April 2020

Name: Oleg Bondar

Punishment: 5,000 Roubles

Court: Chistopol Magistrate's Court No. 4, Republic of Tatarstan

Circumstances: person of unknown religious affiliation charged for repeatedly leaving religious literature in a shop; defendant not a member of a religious group and did not have authorisation from a religious group to perform missionary activity; judge acknowledges March 2018 Constitutional Court definition

Appeal: none yet

33) 29 April 2020

Name: N.Sh. Magomedov

Punishment: 5,000 Roubles

Court: Kirov District Magistrate's Court No. 5, Makhachkala, Dagestan Republic

Circumstances: Muslim charged for giving lessons on Arabic grammar and how to read the Koran at a mosque without necessary documents from the religious organisation for missionary activity

Appeal: none yet

34) 7 May 2020

Name: Aleksey Foltarkin

Punishment: 5,000 Roubles

Court: Noyabrsk Magistrate's Court No. 5, Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Region

Circumstances: same case as Zubov and Gladkikh (see below); Council of Churches Baptist charged for handing out religious literature at a bus stop outside a market, without written authorisation from a religious organisation or group; case brought by police after one uniformed and several plain-clothes officers approached and took the Baptists to a police station for questioning

Appeal: unsuccessful – 16 June 2020, Noyabrsk City Court, Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Region

35) 7 May 2020

Name: Igor Zubov

Punishment: 5,000 Roubles

Court: Noyabrsk Magistrate's Court No. 5, Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Region

Circumstances: Council of Churches Baptist; same case as Foltarkin (see above) and Gladkikh (see below)

Appeal: unsuccessful – 16 June 2020, Noyabrsk City Court, Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Region

36) 7 May 2020

Part 5

Name: Raymond Curran

Punishment: none – statute of limitations expired

Court: October District Court, Tambov

Circumstances: US citizen charged after police inspection found that he was leading services of the unregistered Calvary Chapel Protestant church in a house of culture, accessible to all and without written authorisation from a religious organisation or evidence of its registration; three witnesses apparently requested by police to go into the house of culture and attempt to attend the service; defendant also accused of carrying

out missionary activity on the internet by advertising services "under the pretext of offering free English lessons"; defendant stated that he is the pastor of the church and is therefore permitted to perform missionary activity, that he has a Russian residence permit and written authorisation from the registered centralised Calvary Chapel religious organisation, and that the services he conducts are only for members of the church
Appeal: none

37) 13 May 2020

Name: Galina Gladkikh
Punishment: 5,000 Roubles
Court: Noyabrsk Magistrate's Court No. 5, Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Region
Circumstances: Council of Churches Baptist; same case as Foltarkin and Zubov – see above
Appeal: unsuccessful – 15 June 2020, Noyabrsk City Court, Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Region

38) 13 May 2020

Name: Rusiyet Khuade
Punishment: 5,000 Roubles
Court: Takhtamukhay District Court, Republic of Adygeya
Circumstances: same case as Bogus (below); Muslim charged for "disseminating the religious ideology of the destructive Muslim movement 'Khabashism' by means of WhatsApp messenger, without the authorisation to carry out missionary activity", and without having notified the Justice Ministry of the existence of a religious group
Appeal: unsuccessful – 9 July 2020, Supreme Court of Adygeya

39) 13 May 2020

Name: Dzhanet Bogus
Punishment: unknown
Court: Takhtamukhay District Court, Republic of Adygeya
Circumstances: same case as Khuade (above); Muslim charged for "disseminating the religious ideology of the destructive Muslim movement 'Khabashism' by means of WhatsApp messenger, without the authorisation to carry out missionary activity", and without having notified the Justice Ministry of the existence of a religious group
Appeal: successful – 12 August 2010, Supreme Court of the Republic of Adygeya

40) 21 May 2020

Name: Mikhail Mironov
Punishment: 5,000 Roubles
Court: Troytsky District Magistrate's Court No. 4, Chelyabinsk Region
Circumstances: Council of Churches Baptist pastor charged for conducting unspecified missionary activity without submitting notification of the existence of a religious group – details unknown
Appeal: none yet

41) Unknown date, May 2020

Name: Aleksandr Shurupov
Punishment: unknown
Court: unknown Vyborg District Magistrate's Court, St Petersburg
Circumstances: details unknown

Appeal: rejected without consideration – 2 June 2020, Vyborg District Court, St Petersburg; further appeal lodged on 15 July 2020 – no record yet

42) 8 June 2020

Name: Anatoly Chendemmerov

Punishment: 6,000 Roubles

Court: Yoshkar-Ola Magistrate's Court No. 12, Mari-El Republic

Circumstances: Baptist charged for handing out a publication called "Jesus said: 'You must be born again'" to passers-by outside a shopping centre, without authorisation from a religious organisation or group, and without any notification to the Justice Ministry of the existence of a religious group

Appeal: none yet

Alexander Dvorkin, an enemy of religious minorities, is turning 65 today

Happy birthday, Mr Dvorkin. USCIRF dedicated a special research paper about your crusades against Jehovah's Witnesses and other religious minorities

HRWF (20.08.2020) - For more than 25 years, Alexander Dvorkin, the Russian notorious enemy of any non-Orthodox religious movement in Russia and the post-Soviet space, has been spreading hate speech about Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, Hare Krishna devotees, Falun Gong practitioners and other minority movements in total impunity. He will be 65 today, 20 August.

Who is Alexander Dvorkin?

Alexander Dvorkin was born in Moscow in 1955. On 6 March 1977, he emigrated from the Soviet Union on an Israeli visa. He did not go to Israel but went to the United States. While in the US, he got baptized in 1980 in an Orthodox Church of New York. In 1984, he received American citizenship. In 1988, he graduated with a Doctor of Philosophy in Medieval Studies with a dissertation titled *Ivan the Terrible as a Religious Type*. In 1992, he returned to a newly-independent Russia with many anti-cult ideas to work for the Russian Orthodox Church.

In 1993, he founded the *Saint Irenaeus of Lyons Centre for Religious Studies*, an anti-cult propaganda center, which was blessed by the then Patriarch Alexey II of the Russian Orthodox Church and which became a global network of local Orthodox-oriented anti-cult civic groups and missionary departments of Orthodox dioceses.¹⁴

The *Saint Irenaeus of Lyons Centre for Religious Studies* is also the head centre of the *Russian Association of Centres for Religious and Sectarian Studies* (RATsIRS). The president of RATsIRS is also A.L. Dvorkin; the vice-presidents are Archpriest Alexander Novopashin and Archpriest Alexander Shabanov; the executive secretary is priest Lev Semenov, Ph.D., associate professor.

Since 1993, Dvorkin has been chairing the *Saint Irenaeus of Lyons Centre for Religious Studies* which later on became the Russian member association of FECRIS (European

¹⁴ <https://hrwf.eu/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/2012-1014-FECRIS-BOOK-last-version-2012.pdf>, pp 278, 302-304

Federation of Centres of Research and Information on Cults and Sects), an international anti-cult organization.

Last but not least, Alexander Dvorkin has for years been the vice-president of FECRIS which was created and is based in France, whose constitution strictly separates state and religions. Oddly enough, FECRIS is heavily financed by French public powers, supposed to be secular, while its Russian member association, headed by Alexander Dvorkin, is heavily financed by the Russian Orthodox Church.

Quite recently, the nefarious role of Dvorkin has been recognized by a prestigious US state institution, USCIRF. See hereafter some excerpts of this report:

USCIRF Report: The Anti-Cult Movement and Religious Regulation in Russia and the Former Soviet Union¹⁵

Excerpt 1 about Jehovah's Witnesses

"By the time the Russian government banned the Jehovah's Witnesses in April 2017, Alexander Dvorkin, a Russian anti-cult activist, had spent years lobbying for strong measures against groups he frequently refers to as "totalitarian cults" and "destructive sects"—and the Jehovah's Witnesses were at the top of his list. In an *interview* with state media shortly after the ban, Dvorkin claimed that the group maintains "strict control over every aspect of its members' lives, including even the most intimate moments

of their family lives as spouses have to report on one another." Just as in the days of Stalin, "All members have to keep an eye on each other, to spy on one another," he said. Dvorkin believes that the international human rights community, especially those who advocate for freedom of religion and belief, enable these destructive organizations to prey on society. According to him, "the struggle for human rights is being supplanted with the struggle for the rights of organizations which violate human rights." Banning the Jehovah's Witnesses, to his mind, was not a violation of fundamental freedoms, but rather an essential step for their preservation."

Excerpt 2 about Dvorkin's hate speech and lack of academic legitimacy

Dvorkin has long provided the anti-cult movement with a veneer of intellectual credibility. Since 1999, he has taught Sectarian Studies at the ROC's University of St. Tikhon; yet, his degree in Medieval Studies provides no academic grounding in religious studies or the sociological and psychological concepts on which he so frequently relies. At a seminar in 1993, he allegedly coined the term "totalitarian sect," a concept which effectively merged Western anti-cult ideas with the post-Soviet context, where anxiety about the return to the Stalinist past competed with fears about an unstable present. Totalitarian sects, Dvorkin *explained*, were "authoritarian organizations whose leaders strive to dominate and exploit their followers" through various deceitful "masks." He has compared such leaders to Hitler and Lenin, equated religious communities with the Stalinist Gulag, and said that NRMs had more in common with totalitarian political regimes than "real" religions like the ROC."

Excerpt 3 about Dvorkin as vice-president of FECRIS

¹⁵ <https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2020%20Anti-Cult%20Update%20-%20Religious%20Regulation%20in%20Russia.pdf> July 2020

"Dvorkin's influence has also extended outside of the post-Soviet orbit. In 2009, the same year in which he was appointed head of Russia's Council of Experts, he also became Vice-President of the European Federation of Research and Information Centers on Sectarianism (FECRIS), a French anti-cult organization with pan-European influence. The French government provides the majority of FECRIS' funding and the group regularly spreads negative propaganda about religious minorities, including at international forums like the annual Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Human Dimensions conference. Dvorkin's SILIC is the primary associate of FECRIS in Russia and receives significant financial support from both the ROC and the Russian government."

Much more is to be found about Dvorkin in USCIRF's report by Jason Morton, Policy Analyst and also in "Freedom of Religion or Belief: Anti-Sect Movements and State Neutrality/ A Case Study: FECRIS - FECRIS and its Affiliate in Russia. The Orthodox Clerical Wing of FECRIS ", pp 267-307 (By *Human Rights Without Frontiers correspondent in Russia*)¹⁶

In its recommendations, USCIRF says among other things the U.S. government should:

- Publicly censure Alexander Dvorkin and the Saint Irenaeus of Leon Information-Consultation Center (SILIC)) for their ongoing disinformation campaign against religious minorities;
- Counter propaganda against new religious movements by the European Federation of Research and Information Centers on Sectarianism (FECRIS) at the annual OSCE Human Dimensions Conference with information about the ongoing involvement of individuals and entities within the anti-cult movement in the suppression of religious freedom;

Human Rights Without Frontiers considers that Alexander Dvorkin qualifies for the implementation of the US sanctions under the Magnitsky Law.

100 known "missionary activity" prosecutions in 2019 – list

Forum 18 has found 100 prosecutions in all of 2019 (15 of organisations and 85 of individuals) for violating Russia's July 2016 Administrative Code Article 5.26, Parts 4 and 5, which punish "illegal missionary activity". 76 of the 2019 prosecutions resulted in initial convictions, almost all being punished with fines. 2019 saw a conviction rate of 89 per cent. Eight foreigners were ordered deported.

By Victoria Arnold

Forum 18 (20.08.2020) - <https://bit.ly/3qsmODX> - In the calendar year 2019, there were at least 100 prosecutions across Russia under Administrative Code Article 5.26, Part

¹⁶ <https://hrwf.eu/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/2012-1014-FECRIS-BOOK-last-version-2012.pdf>

4 ("Russians conducting missionary activity") and Part 5 ("Foreigners conducting missionary activity"), according to Forum 18's analysis of available court records.

Overall, this is roughly similar to 2018, when there were 105 such known cases, but 2019 and the first half of 2020 have seen a shift towards more prosecutions for Muslim religious activities, and the first known prosecutions of Catholic and Methodist individuals and organisations.

Of the 100 cases known to have reached court in 2019, 15 involved organisations and 85 individuals. Seventy-six resulted in conviction and nine in acquittal, while judges closed or sent back 15 cases. 2019 therefore saw a conviction rate (for those cases which reached a verdict) of 89.4 per cent. All those convicted received fines (except for one Muslim community which was given a warning), though a few of these were later overturned on appeal.

Of the 15 foreigners charged under Article 5.26, Part 5 ("Foreigners conducting missionary activity"), eight were ordered deported (three by means of enforced expulsion, meaning that they were sent to Interior Ministry detention centres for foreign nationals before departure).

(See here for a full list of the 42 known prosecutions in the first half of 2020, based on court decisions and other information.)

Russia has also imposed its "anti-missionary" legislation in Crimea, which it annexed in 2014. At least 24 prosecutions under Article 5.26, Part 4 are known to have been launched in 2019, of which 17 ended with punishment.

These prosecutions are based on amendments to the Administrative Code and Religion Law introduced in July 2016 as part of the "Yarovaya" package of "anti-terrorism" laws.

Religious organisations may also be prosecuted under Article 5.26, Part 3 ("Implementation of activities by a religious organisation without indicating its official full name, including the issuing or distribution, within the framework of missionary activity, of literature and printed, audio, and video material without a label bearing this name, or with an incomplete or deliberately false label" – see forthcoming F18News article).

List of known 2019 prosecutions

All prosecutions under Administrative Code Article 5.26, Part 4 ("Russians conducting missionary activity") and Part 5 ("Foreigners conducting missionary activity") known to have reached court in the calendar year 2019 are listed below, ordered by date of court hearing. The list is based on court decisions and court records seen by Forum 18, and other information.

A fine of 50,000 Roubles (6,100 Norwegian Kroner, 575 Euros or 675 US Dollars) represents nearly six weeks' average wages for those in work or 16 weeks' average state retirement pension.

1) 10 January 2019

Name: Iman Local Muslim Religious Organisation

Punishment: none – acquitted

Court: Balashikha Magistrate's Court No. 6, Moscow Region

Circumstances: after prosecutor's office inspection of premises, Muslim organisation charged for holding prayers on the grounds of a block of flats without any formal right to the land, and with the use of amplification equipment; community representative denied using amplification, stated that prayers were held indoors, and argued that photos

presented as evidence show people praying in the wrong direction; evidence for use of outside space appears to be only the presence of loudspeakers (not in use at time of inspection) and the painting of railings in the organisation's colours; judge concludes there is no evidence of any offence

Appeal: by prosecutor, unsuccessful – 14 March 2019, Balashikha City Court, Moscow Region

2) 11 January 2019

Name: Gabdukhay Saytkhuzhin

Punishment: none – acquitted

Court: Kunashak District Magistrate's Court No. 2, Chelyabinsk Region

Circumstances: Muslim charged for discussing religion and the Koran, teaching Arabic, and leading Islamic rites and celebrations by invitation of village residents; defendant officially employed as teacher by Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Asiatic Russia and has authorisation from local religious group to conduct missionary and educational activity and act as imam; judge concludes that there is no evidence that defendant disseminated any information about his beliefs among non-Muslims

Appeal: by prosecutor, unsuccessful – 1 March 2019, Kunashak District Court, Chelyabinsk Region

3) 14 January 2019

Name: Rishat Sabitov

Punishment: 5,000 Roubles

Court: Tractor Factory District Magistrate's Court No. 3, Chelyabinsk

Circumstances: after police search and prosecutor's office inspection, Muslim charged for "organising a group professing Islam" without submitting notification of the existence of a religious group, and without authorisation from the group to carry out missionary activity, ie. prayers, Arabic teaching, and the study of Islam, in a rented residential property, "among persons who are not members of this group, in order to involve them in the membership of this group" – appeal acknowledges "defining feature" of missionary activity and concludes that there is no evidence of this in defendant's actions, as the only people present during the inspection were all also Muslims and testified that they were there voluntarily

Appeal: successful (lack of evidence) – 19 April 2019, Tractor Factory District Court, Chelyabinsk

4) 15 January 2019

Name: Sergey Roshchin

Punishment: 5,000 Roubles

Court: Soviet District Magistrate's Court No. 21, Ryazan

Circumstances: Council of Churches Baptist charged by police for handing out religious literature, including newspaper "Do you believe?" and "The most important truths", at a bus stop, without authorisation from a religious group to carry out missionary activity on its behalf or evidence of notification of the existence of a religious group

Appeal: unsuccessful – 6 March 2019, Soviet District Court, Ryazan

5) 15 January 2019

Name: Valery Turkin

Punishment: 5,000 Roubles

Court: Soviet District Magistrate's Court No. 21, Ryazan

Circumstances: Council of Churches Baptist charged by police for handing out religious literature, including newspaper "Do you believe?" and "The most important truths", at a

bus stop, without authorisation from a religious group to carry out missionary activity on its behalf or evidence of notification of the existence of a religious group
Appeal: unsuccessful – 6 March 2019, Soviet District Court, Ryazan

6) 21 January 2019

Name: T.V. Kulichenko

Punishment: none – acquitted

Court: Miass Magistrate's Court No. 9, Chelyabinsk Region

Circumstances: Society for Krishna Consciousness adherent charged for speaking to an audience at a yoga studio and chanting mantras, "aimed at disseminating information about his faith, Krishnaism (Vaishnavism), among persons who are not participants in this religious group, in order to involve them in the group's membership" – without authorisation from a religious group to carry out missionary activity and without submitting notification of the existence of a religious group; defence argued that defendant did have written authorisation; judge notes Constitutional Court's March 2018 description of "defining feature" of missionary activity and concluded that there was no evidence that defendant was seeking to involve people in a religious group: "In itself, the holding of a religious event, in the opinion of the court, does not indicate that the organisers are pursuing the goal of involving those present in the composition of any religious association"

Appeal: by prosecutor, unsuccessful – 15 March 2019, Miass City Court, Chelyabinsk Region

7) 1 February 2019

Name: Shamil Karagishev

Punishment: none – returned to police because of technical errors and not resubmitted

Court: Verkhnebureinsky District Magistrate's Court No. 75, Khabarovsk Region

Circumstances: Muslim imam charged for "the implementation of missionary activity without state registration"; judge points out that police did not include in their report any details of the missionary activity or any reference to a law which required such "state registration", given that defendant is an officially appointed imam of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the Far East; judge also refers to Constitutional Court definition

Appeal: none

8) 7 February 2019

Name: Igor Darayev

Punishment: 5,000 Roubles

Court: Khostinsky Magistrate's Court No. 99, Sochi, Krasnodar Region

Circumstances: leader of local Buddhist religious group charged for organising "collective meditation" in a boathouse for "about a dozen" fellow Buddhists, without written authorisation from a religious association to carry out missionary activity; case brought by prosecutor's office on basis of report from FSB security service.

Appeal: none

9) 20 February 2019

Part 5

Name: Donald Dean Turner

Punishment: 30,000 Roubles plus deportation ("monitored independent departure")

Court: Soviet District Court, Bryansk

Circumstances: American citizen and director of Global Focus charged for speaking, singing hymns, and answering parishioners questions at a New Life church service,

without authorisation from a religious organisation – prosecutor's office (and consequently, FSB) tipped off by a woman who attended the service but said she was not a member of the church, who considers that defendant's "actions are illegal on the territory of the Russian Federation" and a man who claimed he was a church volunteer, who asked prosecutors "to verify the legality of the practice of social and religious activity by foreign citizens on the territory of the region"

Appeal: rejected without consideration – 22 March 2019 and 25 June 2019 (appeal period expired), Bryansk Regional Court; against first rejection, unsuccessful – 23 May 2019, Supreme Court of the Russian Federation

10) 1 March 2019

Part 5

Name: Abdukhamid Gafforov

Punishment: 30,000 Roubles plus deportation (enforced expulsion)

Court: Verkhny Ufaley City Court, Chelyabinsk Region

Circumstances: Tajik citizen charged for leading Friday prayers in a "single-storey, non-residential building, which is used as a mosque, but [for which] documents are absent", without authorisation from the Regional Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Chelyabinsk Region; city prosecutor's office inspection carried out on basis of information from the FSB security service; "forced" deportation imposed because of lack of means; defendant held in temporary detention centre until deportation

Appeal: none

11) 4 March 2019

Name: Bilyar Medrese

Punishment: 50,000 Roubles

Court: Zavolzhsy District Magistrate's Court No. 4, Ulyanovsk

Circumstances: after Justice Ministry inspection, Muslim educational institution charged for "carrying out its activities in [its rented] building with any agreements or documents giving the right to conduct missionary activity"; chairman agreed that there was no lease at the time of inspection, because it had expired and a new head of the medrese had been recently appointed; new lease obtained immediately after inspection; judge notes that "missionary activity" is mentioned in the medrese's constitution (this may be carried out by a religious organisation on its own premises, including rented premises, but lack of lease means right to property cannot be proven); fine reduced as violation now eliminated

Appeal: unsuccessful – 15 May 2019, Zavolzhsy District Court, Ulyanovsk; supervisory, unsuccessful – 5 August 2019, Ulyanovsk Regional Court

12) 13 March 2019

Name: A.I. Yershov

Punishment: none – case sent back and not resubmitted

Court: Moscow District Magistrate's Court No. 5, Cheboksary, Chuvash Republic

Circumstances: Protestant charged for carrying out unspecified missionary activity without submitting notification of the existence of a religious group – judge sends case back to police because the case file contains no documents showing that defendant is the leader of any group and no evidence of the group's activities, and because the protocol was drawn up without defendant's participation

Appeal: none

13) 15 March 2019

Part 5

Name: Kole Brodowski

Punishment: 30,000 Roubles plus deportation (enforced expulsion)

Court: Gulkevichi District Court, Krasnodar Region

Circumstances: American missionary from Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) charged by police (with David Gaag – below) for handing out booklets and talking to people about their religion in the street, without authorisation from a religious organisation or group; defendant denies handing out literature, saying he knew it was not allowed; defendant to be held in a temporary detention centre for foreign citizens until departure

Appeal: none

14) 15 March 2019

Part 5

Name: David Gaag

Punishment: 30,000 Roubles plus deportation (enforced expulsion)

Court: Gulkevichi District Court, Krasnodar Region

Circumstances: American missionary from Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) charged by police (with Kole Brodowski – above) for handing out booklets and talking to people about their religion in the street, without authorisation from a religious organisation or group; defendant denies handing out literature, saying he knew it was not allowed; defendant to be held in a temporary detention centre for foreign citizens until departure

Appeal: none

15) 25 March 2019

Part 5

Name: Roman Ivanko

Punishment: 30,000 Roubles without deportation

Court: Yoshkar-Ola City Court, Mari-El Republic

Circumstances: Ukrainian citizen and Protestant musician charged for singing Christian songs of his own composition without written authorisation from a religious organisation; defence argued that this took place only at a gathering of friends and defendant is not a representative of a religious organisation; two witnesses who are not parishioners stated how they had learned on the VKontakte social network about the event, which was billed as a free concert, and attested that the defendant talked about becoming a believer and sang songs "with a religious motivation"; judge concludes that "the nature of Ivanko's performance, before an unlimited circle of people, with free access of citizens to the premises, is evidence that he was disseminating information about his beliefs among people who are not members of this religious association

Appeal: none

16) 25 March 2019

Name: Yusupzhon Sheykhov

Punishment: 5,000 Roubles

Court: Volgodonsk District Magistrate's Court No. 9, Rostov Region

Circumstances: same case as Aslanov (see below); member of Local Religious Organisation of Muslims of Volgodonsk District charged for "carrying out missionary activity in violation of the requirements of [the Religion Law], by means of the use of residential premises for performing the service of Friday prayers", ie. praying with others in his home without submitting notification of the existence of a religious group; defendant pointed out that other attendees were "his relatives and friends who had professed Islam from childhood, [and] people of other faiths and atheists do not come to these services"; case brought by police

Appeal: unsuccessful – 25 April 2019, Volgodonsk District Court; supervisory, unsuccessful – 2 August 2019, Rostov Regional Court

17) 26 March 2019

Name: Yusup Aslanov

Punishment: 5,000 Roubles

Court: Volgodonsk District Magistrate's Court No. 8, Rostov Region

Circumstances: same case as Sheykhov (see above); chair of Local Religious Organisation of Muslims of Volgodonsk District charged for conducting prayers on residential premises, without submitting notification of the existence of a religious group, and without authorisation from any religious group or organisation; case brought by police; defendant argued that only Muslims were present and people of other faiths were not involved; judge notes that worship services may be held on residential premises, but these premises may only be provided by members of an (officially constituted) religious group

Appeal: unsuccessful – 15 May 2019, Volgodonsk City Court, Rostov Region

18) 28 March 2019

Name: S.M. Pautov

Punishment: unknown

Court: Magistrate's Court No. 64, Vologda Region

Circumstances: Society for Krishna Consciousness adherent charged for advertising the sale of religious literature with a banner in the street (ie. in a place where missionary activity is not provided for by law) and online; defendant had written authorisation from his religious group to carry out missionary activity, but did not indicate this during questioning

Appeal: unsuccessful – 10 June 2019, Cherepovets City Court, Vologda Region; supervisory, unsuccessful – 14 August 2019, Vologda Regional Court

19) 29 March 2019

Name: Oleg Sidletsky

Punishment: 5,000 Roubles (but acquitted on appeal)

Court: Novoilinsky District Magistrate's Court No.1, Novokuznetsk, Kemerovo Region

Circumstances: leader of Light to the World Pentecostal religious group charged for holding a service in a rented cafe, rather than at the address indicated in the group's notification submitted to the Justice Ministry; appeal judge notes March 2018 Constitutional Court definition and concludes that no evidence of missionary activity was presented

Appeal: supervisory, successful – 25 November 2019, Kemerovo Regional Court

20) 5 April 2019

Name: Sergey Lemeshkov

Punishment: none – sent back and not resubmitted

Court: Satka and Satka District Magistrate's Court No. 1, Ulyanovsk Region

Circumstances: Pentecostal pastor – details unknown

Appeal: none

21) 8 April 2019

Name: Yevgeny Olkov

Punishment: none – case closed for unknown reasons

Court: Gorno-Altaysk Magistrate's Court No. 2, Altay Republic

Circumstances: Council of Churches Baptist – details unknown
Appeal: none

22) 15 April 2019

Part 5

Name: Maksim Tashenov

Punishment: 30,000 Roubles plus deportation (monitored independent departure)

Court: Bezhitsky District Court, Bryansk

Circumstances: Kazakh citizen and leader of New Life Protestant Church (Aktau, Kazakhstan) charged for preaching (about recovering from illness "with the help of the word of God"), singing religious songs, and answering congregation's questions at a service at the Awakening Protestant Church, to which he had been invited, without written authorisation from a religious group or organisation to carry out missionary activity; person present at the service later made statement to the police that she had learned of the service online and was not a member of the church, and that defendant spoke of rejecting medical treatment – asked whether "engagement in public and religious activities on the territory of the Russian Federation" is legal; defendant was in Russia to attend a conference and had a commercial visa

Appeal: unsuccessful – 17 May 2019, Bryansk Regional Court

23) 23 April 2019

Name: Nur Local Muslim Organisation

Punishment: none – acquitted

Court: Dimitrovgrad District Magistrate's Court No. 3, Ulyanovsk Region

Circumstances: unknown

Appeal: by police, rejected without consideration – 30 July 2019, Dimitrovgrad City Court, Ulyanovsk Region

24) 24 April 2019

Name: Rasul Abbasov

Punishment: unknown fine

Court: Salsk District Magistrate's Court No. 3, Rostov Region

Circumstances: chair of Local Religious Organisation of Muslims of Sandata village – details unknown

Appeal: none

25) 24 April 2019

Name: Dmitry Knyazev

Punishment: 10,000 Roubles

Court: Lenin District Magistrate's Court No. 1, Novosibirsk

Circumstances: leader of Hare Krishna religious group charged for distributing religious literature at a bus stop during a religious procession of about 15 people, which also involved chanting mantras and handing out food – defendant admitted this but argued that there was no intention of involving non-members in the group; case brought by prosecutor on the basis of information from the FSB security service; judge cites Constitutional Court definition; witness took book for 200 Roubles, then gave it voluntarily to FSB (unclear who instigated this); expert witness concluded that distribution of the book "is an element of missionary activity in the sense of disseminating information about their beliefs among non-members of the Gaudiya Vaishnava religious association"; judge concludes that defendant's actions constituted missionary activity because of "the form and content of the event, its public nature,

[and] the attracting of the attention of an unlimited number of citizens confirm the presence of [this] goal".

Appeal: unsuccessful – 19 June 2019, Lenin District Court, Novosibirsk; supervisory, unsuccessful – 31 July 2019, Novosibirsk Regional Court

26) 29 April 2019

Name: Ancestors' Legacy Cultural and Educational Centre of the Caucasian Peoples

Punishment: 100,000 Roubles

Court: Primorsky District Magistrate's Court No. 167, St Petersburg

Circumstances: cultural centre charged because its director led Muslim prayers on its premises (rented by him from building owner, sublet to centre) without authorisation from a religious group to perform missionary activity or notification of the existence of a religious group; case brought after police inspection triggered by complaint to prosecutor's office that "a group of people of Caucasian ethnicities was regularly holding gatherings and using the premises for missionary activity"

Appeal: partially successful – closed as statute of limitations expired, 1 July 2019, Primorsky District Court, St Petersburg; by prosecution, rejected without consideration – 14 August 2019, St Petersburg City Court

27) 30 April 2019

Name: Yelena Karpunina

Punishment: 5,000 Roubles

Court: Uchaly District Magistrate's Court No. 3, Republic of Bashkortostan

Circumstances: member of Seventh-day Adventist religious group charged for performing "missionary activity", ie. hosting a service in her flat in the presence of non-members without submitting notification of the group's existence, without authorisation from the group itself, and on residential premises (which had also not been noted as location of services in submission of notification); witness statement from sufferer of alcoholism whom defendant invited to services; case brought by prosecutor's office after operative of Interior Ministry's Centre for Countering Extremism found the religious group's website
Appeal: none

28) 14 May 2019

Name: D.D. Kanke

Punishment: none – case closed for unknown reasons

Court: Gorno-Altaysk Magistrate's Court No. 2, Altay Republic

Circumstances: unknown

Appeal: none

29) 15 May 2019

Name: Methodist Church, stantsiya Ugolnaya

Punishment: 100,000 Roubles

Court: Soviet District Magistrate's Court No. 24, Vladivostok, Primorye Region

Circumstances: church charged for holding Far Eastern Conference for Children's Ministers, organised by Methodists and local Transfiguration Baptist Union church, at a sanatorium, involving members of other religious organisations; church had no lease for use of the building, only an oral agreement, therefore could not be said to be conducting missionary activity on its "own" property; prosecutor's office found event advertised online and informed Justice Ministry, leading to police inspection; verdict simultaneously notes that access was "free and open to all" and that online registration was required – but that anyone could register; list of participants included people who were members of different churches and people who had not specified their religious affiliation

Appeal: unsuccessful – 24 June 2019, Soviet District Court, Vladivostok; supervisory, unsuccessful – 21 November 2019, Primorye Regional Court

30) 17 May 2019

Name: Yevgeny Olkov
Punishment: unknown if any imposed
Court: Gorno-Altaysk Magistrate's Court No. 2, Altay Republic
Circumstances: Council of Churches Baptist – details unknown
Appeal: none

31) 17 May 2019

Name: Barakyat Local Muslim Religious Organisation
Punishment: 50,000 Roubles
Court: Zasviyazhsky District Magistrate's Court No. 9, Ulyanovsk
Circumstances: Muslim community (part of the Central Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Ulyanovsk Region) charged for carrying out missionary activity on land belonging to another religious association – the Regional Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Ulyanovsk Region – without its written permission; community representative pointed out that the organisations are identical in their religious beliefs; nature of activity and relationship between organisations unclear
Appeal: unsuccessful – 29 July 2019, Zasviyazhsky District Court, Ulyanovsk; supervisory, unsuccessful – 25 October 2019, Ulyanovsk Regional Court

32) 22 May 2019

Name: Konstantin Panteleyev
Punishment: 5,000 Roubles
Court: October District Magistrate's Court No. 248, Novorossiysk, Krasnodar Region
Circumstances: same case as Shcherbakov (see below); Protestant charged for talking to people at a bus station about God, Easter, and the Gospel, advising them to believe in Jesus Christ, and offering them religious literature; defendant claimed to have "certification" from the centralised religious organisation, the Association of Evangelical Christians (unclear if this is authorisation for missionary activity)
Appeal: rejected without consideration – 8 August 2019, October District Court, Novorossiysk, Krasnodar Region

33) 22 May 2019

Name: Aleksey Shcherbakov
Punishment: 5,000 Roubles
Court: October District Magistrate's Court No. 248, Novorossiysk, Krasnodar Region
Circumstances: same case as Panteleyev (see above); Protestant charged for talking to people at a bus station about God, Easter, and the Gospel, advising them to believe in Jesus Christ, and offering them religious literature; defendant claimed to have "certification" from the centralised religious organisation, the Association of Evangelical Christians (unclear if this is authorisation for missionary activity)
Appeal: unsuccessful – 16 July 2019, October District Court, Novorossiysk, Krasnodar Region

34) 28 May 2019

Name: Mushfig Sheydayev
Punishment: unknown fine
Court: Vyborg District Magistrate's Court No. 24, Leningrad Region

Circumstances: after prosecutor's office inspection based on information received by FSB security service, general director of food processing company charged for permitting Muslim worship in a prayer room on company premises, without submitting notification of the existence of a religious group

Appeal: none

35) 30 May 2019

Part 5

Name: Kurbonali Kakhorov

Punishment: none – acquitted

Court: Frunze District Court, St Petersburg

Circumstances: Tajik citizen charged for carrying out "[Islamic] prayers in the presence of parishioners" in a trailer equipped as a prayer room at a construction site, while "not being a mullah (imam) of a Muslim mosque, [and] officially not part of a religious organisation", and without either authorisation from a religious group or having submitted notification of the existence of a religious group; judge concluded that defendant "did not engage in missionary activity (he did not disseminate information about religious doctrine, [and] did not get anyone to join any religious association".

Appeal: none

36) 7 June 2019

Name: Roman Tulyupa

Punishment: 5,000 Roubles

Court: Salekhard Magistrate's Court No. 2, Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Region

Circumstances: leader of unregistered Council of Churches Baptist religious group charged for holding services in his house, with a notice on the door inviting people to worship at particular times; defendant argues that worship on residential premises is permitted, and that he was not present at the service in question, at which two women whom nobody knew and nobody had invited claim that they were given religious tracts and hymn books (the women testified that they had been invited to the service by a woman one of the had met in the street)

Appeal: case closed as statute of limitations expired before appeal – 11 July 2019, Salekhard City Court, Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Region; supervisory, by police – proceedings halted as appeal lodged by wrong official, 28 October 2019, Court of the Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Region

37) 7 June 2019

Name: I.D. Osmanov

Punishment: 5,000 Roubles

Court: Vyborg District Magistrate's Court No. 20, Leningrad Region

Circumstances: after prosecutor's office inspection of rented (non-residential) prayer room, Muslim charged for holding prayers and "religious conversations" without submitting notification of the existence of a religious group

Appeal: none

38) 11 June 2019

Name: Aleksandr Sevastyanov

Punishment: 5,000 Roubles

Court: October District Magistrate's Court No. 5, Murmansk

Circumstances: Protestant (House of the Potter Church) charged for holding "religious events to disseminate information about the beliefs and work of the religious movement among both persons who were and those who were not participants in (members,

followers of) the religious association, in order to involve [new] participants" – while not having authorisation from a religious group or organisation to perform missionary activity on its behalf and not officially being a leader, and without submitting notification of the existence of a religious group; investigation also found church members distributed invitations to thrice-weekly services via neighbours' postboxes; case brought after prosecutor's office inspection based on apparent surveillance by FSB security service and Interior Ministry's Centre for Countering Extremism

Appeal: unsuccessful – 21 November 2019, October District Court, Murmansk

39) 11 June 2019

Name: Yury Besedin

Punishment: 5,000 Roubles

Court: Pribaykalsk District Magistrate's Court No. 1, Republic of Buryatiya

Circumstances: leader of Protestant religious group charged because group was "not registered in the automated system of registration of non-commercial and religious organisations" – activities included meeting in a flat with 4-5 people, conversations about religion, and distribution of religious literature; defendant pointed out that group not registered because he had not intended to create religious organisation; judge acknowledges Constitutional Court definition, but notes that "The actions of citizens and legal entities that meet the normatively established signs of missionary activity and are carried out on behalf of a religious group that has not notified the authorised body of the start (continuation) of its activity in the manner prescribed by law, may, subject to other necessary conditions, fall under Article 5.26, Part 4".

Appeal: none

40) 11 June 2019

Name: Artur Rusyayev

Punishment: none – acquitted

Court: Chernyakhovsk District Magistrate's Court No. 2, Kaliningrad Region

Circumstances: Muslim charged for holding Friday prayers in a non-residential building on his wife's land; formal agreement of free use drawn up with Muslim religious organisation; judge concludes that police made changes to the protocol without defendant's knowledge (adding information about location of alleged offence) and that local police were "not authorised to exercise functions in the sphere of control (supervision) over the activities of religious organisations"

Appeal: none

41) 11 June 2019

Name: O.M. Alekseyev

Punishment: 5,000 Roubles

Court: Sterlitamak Magistrate's Court No. 2, Republic of Bashkortostan

Circumstances: Baptist charged for conducting services in his home, ie. carrying out missionary activity on residential premises; unclear which agency initiated case or how it learned of defendant's activities

Appeal: none

42) 14 June 2019

Name: Yury Korniyenko

Punishment: 10,000 Roubles

Court: Novorossiysk Magistrate's Court No. 79, Krasnodar Region

Circumstances: Baptist Union pastor charged for leading service in church building after local authorities had obtained a court order barring the congregation (religious group) from using it

Appeal: unsuccessful – 23 July 2019, Primorsky District Court, Novorossiysk, Krasnodar Region

43) 19 June 2019

Name: Yoshkar-Ola Christian Centre Protestant Church

Punishment: 50,000 Roubles

Court: Yoshkar-Ola Magistrate's Court No. 6, Mari El Republic

Circumstances: same case as Ivanko (above); Protestant church charged because a visitor (Ukrainian citizen also prosecuted under Part 5) performed religious songs and spoke in the church's own building, without written authorisation from the religious organisation; appeal based on March 2018 Constitutional Court definition; two witnesses testified that they were not members of the church and had attended the performance after seeing it advertised online

Appeal: unsuccessful – 15 August 2019, Yoshkar-Ola City Court, Mari El Republic

44) 20 June 2019

Name: Pyotr Zhuk

Punishment: 5,000 Roubles

Court: Lenin District Magistrate's Court No. 5, Ufa, Republic of Bashkortostan

Circumstances: pastor of Baptist Union Holy Trinity Church charged for holding services and other religious events on the third floor of his house (ie. on residential premises) under an agreement of free use with his church; third floor contains hall with benches, lectern, religious literature, etc.; "There is free access to the residential building and [the hall], where, on an ongoing basis, with the participation of parishioners and other interested persons, various religious events are held, where information about their faith is disseminated, including among persons who are not participants (members, followers) in this religious association – that is, missionary activity is carried out"; verdict also notes advertising online and on VKontakte

Appeal: none

45) 24 June 2019

Name: Mukhiddin Khasanov

Punishment: 5,000 Roubles

Court: Salsk District Magistrate's Court No. 3, Rostov Region

Circumstances: Muslim imam (member of Local Religious Organisation of Muslims of Salsk District) charged for "conducting collective prayer and preaching, aimed at the dissemination of information about his beliefs (Islam), among people who are not participants in (members of) any Muslim religious organisation or group registered on the territory of Salsk and Salsk District", without submitting notification of the existence of a religious group; defendant is not a member of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Rostov Region and carried out "missionary activity" without written authorisation

Appeal: none

46) 24 June 2019

Name: Arslan Abbasov

Punishment: 5,000 Roubles

Court: Salsk District Magistrate's Court No. 3, Rostov Region

Circumstances: Muslim (chairman of Local Religious Organisation of Muslims of Berezovka Village) charged for "conducting collective prayer and preaching, aimed at the

dissemination of information about his beliefs (Islam), among people who are not participants in (members of) any Muslim religious organisation or group registered on the territory of Salsk and Salsk District", without submitting notification of the existence of a religious group; defendant is not a member of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Rostov Region and carried out "missionary activity" without written authorisation
Appeal: none

47) 28 June 2019

Name: Konstantin Petrenko

Punishment: 5,000 Roubles

Court: Beloretsk Magistrate's Court No. 3, Republic of Bashkortostan

Circumstances: Council of Churches Baptist pastor charged for talking about "the need to attract new followers to the ranks of the church in order to spread the religion among non-believers, with the aim of involving them as participants in the religious community (members, followers)" and "disseminating information about religion of Evangelical Christian-Baptists, thereby carrying out missionary work in violation of the requirements of [the Religion Law]", ie. on residential premises and without having submitted notification of the existence of a religious group; one witness statement cited evidence of "involvement in [Petrenko's] group of persons who are not participants in this religious association" – woman who learned about Petrenko's sermon in a newspaper she had been given in the square (of the town) and attended the church after her mother's funeral; Petrenko not present when investigators went to church (on basis of call made to police), none of the congregation gave testimony, and investigators used map.drevolife.ru website to find out what the church was and who its pastor is, and drew up the protocol on that basis; verdict notes that "The church is open to all comers [and] is freely accessible, participants are offered religious literature".

Appeal: unsuccessful – 31 July 2019, Beloretsk Interdistrict Court, Republic of Bashkortostan

48) Unknown date, July 2019

Name: Valery Skvortsov

Punishment: 5,000 Roubles

Court: Lenin District Magistrate's Court No. 1, Novosibirsk

Circumstances: defendant of unknown religious affiliation had written authorisation from his religious group to carry out missionary activity (though documentation did not reach magistrate's court in time for hearing) and was not in a prohibited location; defendant did not attend original hearing as had not received the SMS informing him of the time and date – notification in this way may only be used with the defendant's agreement and should be followed up if confirmation of receipt not received – appeal judge overturns ruling on grounds that magistrate did not "did not create the necessary conditions to ensure the procedural guarantees of the rights of the defendant" and violated his right to a fair trial; statute of limitation also expired by time of appeal

Appeal: successful – 20 September 2019, Lenin District Court, Novosibirsk

49) 4 July 2019

Part 5

Name: Abdusamad Mirzoyev

Punishment: none – returned for technical reasons

Court: Nerchinsk District Court, Transbaykal Region

Circumstances: unknown religious affiliation, unknown citizenship – charged for performing unspecified "missionary activity" without authorising documents from a religious organisation

Appeal: none

50) 9 July 2019

Name: Islam Salikhov

Punishment: 5,000 Roubles

Court: Gatchina District Magistrate's Court No. 29 / 30, Leningrad Region

Circumstances: imam of Dagestan Cultural and Educational Centre charged for holding services and doing outreach work, interpreted as "missionary activity", without having notified the local Justice Ministry of the existence of a religious group; inspection by prosecutor's office staff, police, and officers of the Interior Ministry's Centre for Countering Extremism (after call from member of the public) found about 60 people attending prayers; premises provided to centralised Muslim religious organisation (St Petersburg and Leningrad Region Muftiyat) for use as a cultural and education centre and for religious worship – defendant said during questioning that he did not belong to the centre but carried out its activities on behalf of the Muftiyat, and undertook to submit documents confirming this affiliation; witnesses confirmed "the implementation by I.G. Salikhov of religious activities using special paraphernalia, namely a headdress and a robe"

Appeal: unsuccessful – 25 October 2019, Gatchina City Court, Leningrad Region

51) 23 July 2019

Name: Amor Otman

Punishment: none – acquitted

Court: Krasnoselsky District Magistrate's Court No. 102, St Petersburg

Circumstances: unknown

Appeal: none

52) Unknown date, August 2019

Name: Local Religious Organisation of Muslims of Khimki

Punishment: 100,000 Roubles

Court: Khimki District Magistrate's Court No. 264, Moscow Region

Circumstances: after prosecutor's office inspection of compliance with Religion Law, Muslim community charged for carrying out "missionary activity" on premises (cultural centre) which it had no formal right to use and which was open to all, including non-members of the religious organisation – local administration had granted free use of part of the cultural centre, but not of a corridor and certain rooms used for worship at time of inspection

Appeal: unsuccessful – 26 November 2019, Khimki City Court, Moscow Region

53) 1 August 2019

Name: Valery Turkin

Punishment: none – case sent back and not resubmitted

Court: Moscow District Magistrate's Court No. 10, Ryazan

Circumstances: same case as Roshchin – see below; Council of Churches Baptist charged for distributing the newspaper "Do you believe?", prayer cards with the Lord's Prayer, and copies of the New Testament and Psalms to passers-by in the street, and issuing invitations to services – without authorisation from a religious group/organisation or submitting notification of the existence of a religious group – judge returns case to police as they did not describe the alleged offence fully in their report

Appeal: none

54) 1 August 2019

Name: Sergey Roshchin

Punishment: none – case sent back and not resubmitted

Court: Moscow District Magistrate's Court No. 10, Ryazan

Circumstances: same case as Turkin – see above; Council of Churches Baptist charged for distributing the newspaper "Do you believe?", prayer cards with the Lord's Prayer, and copies of the New Testament and Psalms to passers-by in the street, and issuing invitations to services – without authorisation from a religious group/organisation or submitting notification of the existence of a religious group – judge returns case to police as they did not describe the alleged offence fully in their report

Appeal: none

55) 6 August 2019

Name: Vitaly Kolesnichenko

Punishment: 5,000 Roubles

Court: Yegoryevsk District Magistrate's Court No. 43, Moscow Region

Circumstances: director of the Time for a Change rehabilitation centre (for disabled people, homeless children, "problem youth", drug addicts, alcoholics, ex-prisoners) charged for holding services and reading religious literature and preaching to residents, without submitting notification of the existence of a religious group; court decided that rehab centre is "cell" of the Protestant Holy Trinity Church, and defendant is its leader; former resident turned volunteer testified that he had adopted a different religion after undergoing rehab there

Appeal: unsuccessful – 3 March 2020, Yegoryevsk City Court, Moscow Region

56) 8 August 2019

Name: Maksim Zelenchenkov

Punishment: none – statute of limitations expired

Court: Fokinsky District Magistrate's Court No. 72, Bryansk

Circumstances: Baptist Union member charged for suggesting to pupils of School of Correction and Development VIII No. 37, during a religious celebration at the school, that they go to Baptist events and prayers – without parents' permission to conduct missionary activity

Appeal: none

57) 12 August 2019

Name: Vladimir Akulov

Punishment: 5,000 Roubles

Court: Oymyakon Magistrate's Court No. 24, Sakha Republic (Yakutiya)

Circumstances: Protestant charged for visiting flats to talk to people about God and salvation, discuss social questions, and give out booklets on religious themes – ie. missionary activity on residential premises; defendant stated that he was acting on his own behalf and that the booklets did not carry the name of any religious organisation; one person he visited – a local deputy – telephoned the police; defendant had written authorisation from the Union of Nehemiah Centralised Religious Organisation of Evangelical Christians

Appeal: none

58) 13 August 2019

Name: Aleksey Blashkun

Punishment: 5,000 Roubles

Court: Kudymkar Magistrate's Court No. 1 / 3, Perm Region

Circumstances: after inspection by city prosecutor and inter-agency working group on countering illegal migration, terrorism, and extremist activity (based on information from FSB security service), leader of Council of Churches Baptist religious group charged for "organising the systematic carrying out of religious rituals on Sundays from 10.00am, as evidenced by a sign on the fence of the residential building, [and] the distribution of printed publications of the [Council of Churches] about his beliefs to persons who are not members of this religious association in the city", without submitting notification of the existence of a religious group
Appeal: unsuccessful – 25 September 2019, Kudymkar City Court, Perm Region

59) 14 August 2019

Name: T.M. Zayimov
Punishment: 6,000 Roubles
Court: October District Magistrate's Court No. 4, Rostov Region
Circumstances: Muslim charged for leading Friday prayers on residential premises, and without having registered a religious organisation or submitted notification of the creation of a religious group; case brought by police; defendant explained that he was in the process of preparing documents to register the community
Appeal: none

60) 19 August 2019

Name: R.Kh. Magomadov
Punishment: unknown
Court: Western City District Magistrate's Court No. 27, Krasnodar
Circumstances: unknown
Appeal: none

61) 21 August 2019

Name: Aleksey Kolomytsev
Punishment: 5,000 Roubles
Court: Pervomaysky District Magistrate's Court No. 76, Omsk
Circumstances: Society for Krishna Consciousness adherent charged for participating in a "public event" with mantras and drumming, in a park, without written authorisation from a religious organisation or group and without submitting notification of the existence of a religious group; group leader explained that the event was a form of meditation and not intended to attract new members; two witnesses testified that they had also participated, as non-members of the group, and had only learned it was a religious group during questioning; case brought by Interior Ministry's Centre for Countering Extremism
Appeal: rejected as appeal period expired – 25 October 2019, Pervomaysky District Court, Omsk

62) 28 August 2019

Name: Pavel Strelnikov
Punishment: none – sent back and not resubmitted
Court: Lenin District Magistrate's Court No. 24, Irkutsk
Circumstances: Pentecostal pastor – details unknown
Appeal: none

63) 5 September 2019

Name: Salvation Protestant Church
Punishment: 50,000 Roubles (but case closed on re-examination)

Court: Volosovo District Magistrate's Court No. 4, Leningrad Region

Circumstances: church charged for holding service in a hall for which the rental agreement had not been concluded, in the presence of people who were not members; prosecutor's office inspection carried out on basis of anonymous phone call complaining about use of amplification at twice-weekly worship events; centralised religious organisation Association of Christian Evangelical Churches sent letter to court testifying that everyone present at the inspected service was a Protestant Christian

Appeal: sent for re-examination – 11 October 2019, Volosovo District Court, Leningrad Region; case closed on re-examination as statute of limitations had expired – 18 November 2019, Volosovo District Magistrate's Court No. 4, Leningrad Region

64) 5 September 2019

Part 5

Name: Abed Alaziz Kanj

Punishment: 30,000 Roubles plus deportation (monitored independent departure)

Court: Maykop City Court, Adygeya Republic

Circumstances: Lebanese citizen and medical student of unknown religious affiliation charged for carrying out unspecified missionary activity in a classroom at a university hostel; defendant stated that he was unaware that missionary activity was not allowed – judge pointed out that his resident permit required him to demonstrate knowledge of Russian law

Appeal: unsuccessful – 12 September 2019, Supreme Court of the Adygeya Republic; supervisory, rejected without consideration – 17 January 2020, 4th Cassational Court, Krasnodar

65) 9 September 2019

Name: F.A. Yusupov

Punishment: 5,000 Roubles

Court: Lenin District Magistrate's Court No. 4, Magnitogorsk, Chelyabinsk Region

Circumstances: Muslim charged for holding prayers in a market building without written authorisation for missionary activity from a religious organisation or group, and without submitting notification to the Justice Ministry of the existence of a religious group; that the prayer room is freely accessible and not closed at night, and is "equipped for the implementation of religious rituals" with prayer rugs, religious literature, and images of Mecca on the walls, is taken as evidence that defendant "organised the dissemination of information about[his] beliefs] among people who do not profess Islam"; witnesses confirm that "anyone of any faith" can enter the room and anyone can read the prayers

Appeal: none

66) 9 September 2019

Name: Nikolay Stasyuk

Punishment: 5,000 Roubles

Court: Karasuk District Magistrate's Court No. 3, Novosibirsk Region

Circumstances: Council of Churches Baptist charged for handing out religious newspapers and literature (including the Bible, "Herald of Truth", and the paper "Do you believe?") from a tent in his yard, "that is, on premises not provided to a religious association by any right of property" and without having submitted notification of the existence of a religious group; defendant said he was not part of any religious association

Appeal: unsuccessful – 24 October 2019, Karasuk District Court, Novosibirsk Region

67) 9 September 2019

Part 5

Name: Dzhabrail Abiyev

Punishment: 30,000 Roubles without deportation

Court: Myski City Court, Kemerovo Region

Circumstances: same case as Abbasov and Talybov (below); Azerbaijani citizen identified by police and FSB security service as having performed "missionary activity" in a Muslim prayer house on behalf of a religious organisation "without appropriate permission or right", ie. without authorising documents from the religious organisation; not deported as being unable to be in Russia would interfere with defendant's right to a family life

Appeal: none

68) 9 September 2019

Part 5

Name: Khafiz Abbasov

Punishment: 30,000 Roubles without deportation

Court: Myski City Court, Kemerovo Region

Circumstances: same case as Abiyev (above) and Talybov (below); Azerbaijani citizen identified by police and FSB as having performed "missionary activity" in a Muslim prayer house on behalf of a religious organisation "without appropriate permission or right", ie. without authorising documents from the religious organisation; not deported as being unable to be in Russia would interfere with defendant's right to a family life

Appeal: none

69) 9 September 2019

Name: M.M. Talybov

Punishment: unknown fine

Court: Myski Magistrate's Court No. 2, Kemerovo Region

Circumstances: Muslim – details unknown but likely same case as Abiyev and Abbasov (above)

Appeal: none

70) 10 September 2019

Name: Timofey Trefilov

Punishment: 5,000 Roubles

Court: Industrial District Magistrate's Court No. 6, Izhevsk, Udmurt Republic

Circumstances: Society for Krishna Consciousness adherent charged for posting video on Vkontakte of himself and a fellow believer chanting mantras

Appeal: unsuccessful – 13 January 2020, Industrial District Court, Izhevsk, Udmurt Republic

71) 16 September 2019

Name: A.S. Velengura

Punishment: unknown

Court: October District Magistrate's Court No. 248, Novorossiysk, Krasnodar Region

Circumstances: unknown

Appeal: none

72) 17 September 2019

Name: Yury Degtyar

Punishment: none – statute of limitations expired

Court: Yarovoye Magistrate's Court, Altai Region

Circumstances: Council of Churches Baptist pastor – details unknown

Appeal: none

73) 17 September 2019

Part 5

Name: Andrzej Zalewski

Punishment: 30,000 Roubles without deportation

Court: Leningrad District Court, Kaliningrad

Circumstances: Polish citizen and Catholic priest charged for carrying out missionary activity on behalf of Nativity Catholic Church of the Byzantine Rite, which is not a registered religious organisation and has not submitted notification of its existence as a religious group; defendant celebrated the liturgy of St John Chrysostom on premises of Caritas-West charity, with which a lease had been agreed; defendant stated that he had lodged application to register parish as religious organisation three days before alleged offence (not yet approved, therefore lease invalid); case brought by police after patrol officers noticed loud music and "suspicious citizens" coming from the property.

Appeal: none

74) 19 September 2019

Name: D.D. Sharipov

Punishment: none – case closed for unknown reason

Court: Luga Magistrate's Court No. 81, Leningrad Region

Circumstances: Muslim (same case as Local Religious Organisation of Muslims of Luga and Luga District – see below); details unknown

Appeal: none

75) 19 September 2019

Name: Local Religious Organisation of Muslims of Luga and Luga District

Punishment: none – case closed for unknown reason

Court: Luga Magistrate's Court No. 81, Leningrad Region

Circumstances: same case as Sharipov (above); details unknown

Appeal: none

76) 20 September 2019

Name: Marat Tashenov

Punishment: none – expiry of statute of limitations

Court: Oblivskaya District Magistrate's Court No. 1, Rostov Region

Circumstances: defendant charged for performing unspecified "missionary activity" in an "unregistered Muslim prayer house"

Appeal: none

77) 25 September 2019

Name: D.E. Knyazeva

Punishment: 10,000 Roubles

Court: October District Magistrate's Court No. 3, Novosibirsk

Circumstances: Society for Krishna Consciousness adherent charged for handing out copies of the book "In search of enlightenment" outside metro station in return for donations; defendant had written authorisation from religious group to carry out missionary activity, the group had notified the Justice Ministry of its existence, and notification of the "public event" (ie. distribution of literature) had been made to the mayor's office – not taken into account by magistrate, but grounds for acquittal on appeal; case brought by police but also involved information from the FSB

Appeal: successful – 18 November 2019, October District Court, Novosibirsk

78) 25 September 2019

Name: Ramazan Khuako

Punishment: 35,000 Roubles

Court: Teuzhesky District Magistrate's Court No. 2, Adygeysk, Adygeya Republic

Circumstances: former imam of Pchegatlukay village mosque charged for continuing to hold services and preach in the mosque after being dismissed in 2015 (and expelled from council of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Adygeya Republic); mosque closed while new imam found, but nobody apparently appointed; available court documents do not specify why defendant was relieved of his positions

Appeal: unsuccessful – 5 December 2019, Teuzhesky District Court; supervisory, unsuccessful – 5 June 2020, 4th Cassational Court, Krasnodar

79) 30 September 2019

Name: I.S. Berezhnov

Punishment: 5,000 Roubles

Court: Chishmy District Magistrate's Court No. 1, Republic of Bashkortostan

Circumstances: leader of Enlightenment Protestant religious group charged for "publicly [disseminating] information about his beliefs among people who are not members of or participants in the religious association" – ie. holding religious services for people with behavioural needs – on residential premises, where, judge notes, missionary activity is prohibited; district prosecutor's office inspection of compliance with Religion Law, based on information from Republic prosecutor's office; local Justice Ministry confirmed that it had received notification of the existence of the religious group

Appeal: none

80) 8 October 2019

Name: Sarsky Khutor Local Muslim Religious Organisation

Punishment: warning

Court: Maysky District Magistrate's Court No. 2, Republic of Kabardino-Balkariya

Circumstances: charged for performing unspecified "missionary activity" in a house of culture, "that is, on premises it had no right to use"; case brought by police on basis of checks made by prosecutor's office, FSB security service, police, and local administration; community had used the building for five years on the basis of an oral agreement with a Maysky local administration staff member; imam pointed out that there were no negative consequences; court agrees and notes that local administration did not claim damages and was not named as a victim by the police

Appeal: case closed as statute of limitations expired – 6 November 2019, Maysky District Court, Republic of Kabardino-Balkariya

81) 10 October 2019

Name: Akhmed Magomedov

Punishment: 6,000 Roubles

Court: Orlovsky District Magistrate's Court No. 1, Rostov Region

Circumstances: Muslim charged for leading prayers on residential premises, "without the creation of a religious group or religious organisation, and also without written notification of the start of a religious group's activities"; case brought by police

Appeal: none

82) 17 October 2019

Name: Saydmakhmad Gayurov
Punishment: unknown fine
Court: Leninsk-Kuznetsky Magistrate's Court No. 1, Kemerovo Region
Circumstances: Muslim – details unknown
Appeal: none

83) 25 October 2019

Name: I.R. Azizov
Punishment: 5,000 Roubles
Court: Zimovniki District Magistrate's Court No. 2, Rostov Region
Circumstances: Muslim charged for "conducting collective prayer and preaching, aimed at the dissemination of information about his beliefs (Islam), among people who are not participants in (members of) any Muslim religious organisation or group registered on the territory of Lenin khutor, Zimovniki District, Rostov Region", without submitting notification of the existence of a religious group; defendant is not a member of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Rostov Region and carried out "missionary activity" without written authorisation
Appeal: none

84) 28 October 2019

Name: IC İċtaş İnşaat - Astaldi Konsorsiyumu İCA
Punishment: 100,000 Roubles
Court: Tosnensky District Magistrate's Court No. 70, Leningrad Region
Circumstances: same case as Bayrak (see below); after police inspection of Turkish construction company's premises "to prevent religious extremism", company charged for allowing a digger driver to act as imam and lead Friday prayers for workers in their camp, without authorising documents from religious organisation, "in the presence of 20 parishioners who are not members of the local religious organisation"; "he discussed and disseminated among them information on his faith, 'Islam'"; multiple witness statements from attendees testifying only to "group prayers"
Appeal: none

85) 29 October 2019

Name: Oleg Kuzin
Punishment: 5,000 Roubles
Court: October District Magistrate's Court No. 18, Ryazan
Circumstances: same case as Makarov (see below); pastor of Ryazan Wesleyan Church charged for handing out Gideon New Testaments and Psalters outside Ryazan State Radiotechnical University; defendant taken for questioning by officers of Interior Ministry's Centre for Countering Extremism as he handed over a bible; defendant argued that he had not attempted to involve anyone in any religious organisation, and that the New Testament is common to all Christian denominations – two students testified that he asked only if he could give them a bible; defendant had authorisation for missionary activity, but did not present it to police as he did not believe he was carrying out missionary activity
Appeal: successful – 15 January 2020, October District Court, Ryazan

86) 30 October 2019

Name: Local Religious Organisation of Muslims of Yegoryevsk District
Punishment: 100,000 Roubles
Court: Yegoryevsk District Magistrate's Court No. 46, Moscow Region

Circumstances: as result of inspection by prosecutor's office, FSB security service, police, fire service, and consumer rights and human welfare inspectorate, Muslim organisation charged for carrying out missionary activity without notifying the authorities of a change in the location of its activities (ie. it holds services at a different address from the one in its tax records); accused of "disseminating information about their doctrine of 'Islam', including during the implementation of religious events in the prayer house, with the involvement of a significant number of citizens of various nationalities who are not members of the [religious organisation], which leads (can lead) to a change in citizens' religion and their adoption of the corresponding religion"

Appeal: unsuccessful – 25 March 2020, Yegoryevsk City Court, Moscow Region

87) 31 October 2019

Name: Aleksandr Solovyov

Punishment: none – acquitted

Court: Shadrinsk District Magistrate's Court No. 26, Kurgan Region

Circumstances: after prosecutor's office inspection (based on information from FSB security service), Baptist Union pastor (Ark Church, Shadrinsk) and director of rehabilitation centre charged for conducting "rites and services, the study of religion, and religious education" without having submitted notification of the existence of a religious group; FSB noted that the centre was used "to disseminate Protestant religious teachings of an extremist orientation"; according to prosecutors, during the service, defendant "reads a Biblical text, explains it, and comments on it, ie. carries out missionary activity"; centre volunteer and patients testify that Bible study is a part of daily activities, but defendant is rarely present at the centre and has not attempted to involve them in any religious group; judge notes that prosecutor's office inspection was conducted in violation of the law, as the wrong person (ie. not defendant) was informed that it would take place and witnesses were not warned of their rights and responsibilities under the law, and therefore all evidence obtained is inadmissible

Appeal: by prosecutor, unsuccessful – 12 December 2019, Shadrinsk District Court, Kurgan Region

88) 6 November 2019

Name: Yuliya Arkharova

Punishment: 5,000 Roubles

Court: Moscow District Magistrate's Court No. 10, Ryazan

Circumstances: same case as Gruzdev (below); Society for Krishna Consciousness adherent charged for posting Hare Krishna videos on the Gaurang Club's openly accessible VKontakte social network page, alongside photos of the club's yoga classes; expert witness testified that the videos/photos show "a religious action to which everyone is invited, which indicates that these events are consistent with the definition of missionary activity, aimed at attracting new participants, as well as introducing everyone who wishes to the teaching of Krishnaism. The information on the creed of Krishnaism distributed by [Arkharova] is not aimed at the neutral informing of others about the religious association and its activities"; no Hare Krishna religious organisation registered in Ryazan and no notification sent to Justice Ministry of the creation of a religious group; verdict refers to "defining feature of missionary activity" though does not cite Constitutional Court

Appeal: successful – 10 December 2019, Moscow District Court, Ryazan

89) 6 November 2019

Name: Vladislav Gruzdev

Punishment: 5,000 Roubles

Court: Moscow District Magistrate's Court No. 10, Ryazan

Circumstances: same case as Arkharova (above); Society for Krishna Consciousness adherent charged for posting Hare Krishna videos linked to the Gaurang Club, and other Hare Krishna themed video material, on his own VKontakte social network page.
Appeal: successful – 10 December 2019, Moscow District Court, Ryazan

90) 14 November 2019

Name: Tyurkan Bayrak
Punishment: 5,000 Roubles
Court: Tosnensky District Magistrate's Court No. 70, Leningrad Region
Circumstances: same case as Turkish construction company (above); digger driver charged for leading Friday prayers for construction workers in their camp, without authorising documents from religious organisation, "in the presence of 20 parishioners who are not members of the local religious organisation"; "he discussed and disseminated among them information on his faith, 'Islam'; multiple witness statements from attendees testifying only to "group prayers"
Appeal: none

91) 26 November 2019

Part 5

Name: Sun Sig Un
Punishment: none – case sent back and not resubmitted
Court: Prikubansky District Court, Krasnodar Region
Circumstances: South Korean – details unknown
Appeal: none

92) 27 November 2019

Name: Sergey Bachkala
Punishment: 5,000 Roubles
Court: Apsheronk District Magistrate's Court No. 252, Krasnodar Region
Circumstances: after police inspection, Council of Churches Baptist pastor charged for holding services in his house without authorisation for missionary activity from a religious group or organisation, and without submitting notification to the Justice Ministry of the existence of a religious group; "On the facade of [the house] are banners with religious content. Thus, in violation of the [Religion Law], Bachkala publicly displays materials providing information about the belief system of the religious group Evangelical Christians-Baptists, which has not passed state registration .. in the opinion of the court, [the banners] are aimed at arousing the desire of citizens to study this belief system, as well as in order to involve individuals as followers of the belief system"; mentions "defining feature of missionary activity"; "Almost all the information posted at map.drevolife.ru is devoted to the activities of the Protestant churches of the Russian Federation, which, in the opinion of the court, cannot be regarded as neutral information, but testifies to Bachkala's conscious missionary activity on the Internet, aimed at spreading the beliefs of the religious group of Evangelical Christians-Baptists".
Appeal: unsuccessful – 16 January 2020, Apsheronk District Court, Krasnodar Region

93) 10 December 2019

Name: Artur Utyamishev
Punishment: none – acquitted
Court: Nevsky District Magistrate's No. 130, St Petersburg
Circumstances: building site director charged for allowing a Muslim prayer room in his workers' accommodation; defence argued that defendant did not conduct missionary

activity, as not a member of any religious association; also pointed out that no mosque is nearby; judge notes "defining feature" of missionary activity
Appeal: none

94) 12 December 2019

Name: Fyodor Makarov

Punishment: 5,000 Roubles

Court: October District Magistrate's Court No. 18, Ryazan

Circumstances: same case as Kuzin (above); member of Ryazan Wesleyan Church charged for handing out Gideon New Testaments and Psalters outside Ryazan State Radiotechnical University; defendant did have authorisation for missionary activity – ignored by police but grounds for acquittal on appeal.

Appeal: successful – 12 February 2020, October District Court, Ryazan

95) 13 December 2019

Name: Sergey Parakhin

Punishment: 5,000 Roubles

Court: Lenin District Magistrate's Court No. 4, Magnitogorsk, Chelyabinsk Region

Circumstances: after inspection by Interior Ministry's Centre for Countering Extremism, Seventh-day Adventist pastor charged for conducting weekly services in church, while not having power of attorney for the religious organisation; appeal judge notes that building belongs to church, defendant was officially appointed as clergy, and the holding of services by clergyman on church's own premises does not constitute missionary activity under the Constitutional Court's March 2018 definition

Appeal: successful – 30 January 2020, Lenin District Court, Magnitogorsk, Chelyabinsk Region

96) 19 December 2019

Name: Khater (Memory) Local Religious Organisation of Muslims

Punishment: 50,000 Roubles

Court: Ordzhonikidze District Magistrate's Court No. 5, Magnitogorsk, Chelyabinsk Region

Circumstances: after inspection by Centre for Countering Extremism "aimed at verifying the existence of extremist activities", Muslim community charged for holding services; according to prosecutors "any citizen had access" and "at the entrance of the religious organisation was a sign with its name and an indication of [its] religion; this information can encourage any citizen to get acquainted with the religion, this activity pertains to missionary activity since it is aimed at disseminating information on its doctrine among non-participants"; premises sub-let from driving school (agreement since terminated by Muslims) – prosecutors argued that prayers violated terms of lease, which stated that premises could only be used for educational activities; representatives argued that the organisation did not conduct missionary activity, but only held Friday prayers, followed by a sermon, which were only attended by Muslims, and "everyone who comes is accepted"; counter-extremism officer confirmed in court that no evidence of extremist activity had been found; "taking into account the fact that Khater does not limit attendance at religious events [and] there was no register of followers .. the activity of Khater may be qualified as 'missionary'; purpose of services is "to convey to other people the meaning of the Muslim religion, [and] the righteousness of the life of the Prophet clarifies its meaning. At the same time, as a result of this clarification, the meeting participants learn about the creed and its tenets. The magistrate considers that there is also a second sign of missionary activity - a focus on the dissemination of information about one's beliefs among persons who are not participants (members, followers) of a given religious association, in order to involve them in the activities of a religious association. Also, the presence of the third sign of missionary activity is confirmed,

namely, its implementation in public, since these activities were carried out in a public place with the participation of more than 20 people, with free access, as shown, in particular, by police attending the meeting during the inspection"

Appeal: unsuccessful – 27 February 2020, Ordzhonikidze District Court, Magnitogorsk; supervisory appeal lodged 10 April 2020, 7th Cassational Court, Chelyabinsk – outcome unknown

97) 23 December 2019

Part 5

Name: Hamza Çaliskan

Punishment: 30,000 Roubles plus deportation (monitored independent departure)

Court: Soviet District Court, Astrakhan

Circumstances: Islamic teacher and Turkish citizen charged for giving sermons "aimed at revealing the essence of the religion of Islam of the Hanafi persuasion", as established by inspections of the City of Astrakhan Medrese religious group by regional prosecutor's office and Interior Ministry's Centre for Countering Extremism; defendant did not have authorisation to carry out missionary activity on behalf of the religious group, and religious group had not submitted notification of its existence to the Justice Ministry

Appeal: none

98) 24 December 2019

Part 5

Name: Galym Amirov

Punishment: 30,000 Roubles plus deportation (monitored independent departure)

Court: Soviet District Court, Astrakhan

Circumstances: Islamic teacher and Kazakh citizen charged for giving sermons "aimed at revealing the essence of the religion of Islam of the Hanafi persuasion", as established by inspections of the City of Astrakhan Medrese religious group by regional prosecutor's office and Interior Ministry's Centre for Countering Extremism; defendant did not have authorisation to carry out missionary activity on behalf of the religious group, and religious group had not submitted notification of its existence to the Justice Ministry

Appeal: none

99) 25 December 2019

Name: Akhl al-Beyt (Family of the Prophet) Local Religious Organisation of Muslims

Punishment: 100,000 Roubles

Court: Ordzhonikidze District Magistrate's Court No. 8, Magnitogorsk, Chelyabinsk Region

Circumstances: Muslim community charged for holding twice-weekly services accessible to all in rented premises without the agreement of both owners (contract only signed by one); inspection carried out by Centre for Countering Extremism; witness states that his acquaintance, the head of the community, invited him to the premises for supper and to discuss religious topics

Appeal: unsuccessful – 12 February 2020, Ordzhonikidze District Court, Magnitogorsk, Chelyabinsk Region

100) 25 December 2019

Name: Rimm Urazayev

Punishment: 5,000 Roubles

Court: Agapovka District Magistrate's Court No. 1, Chelyabinsk Region

Circumstances: as result of prosecutor's office inspection, Muslim charged for holding Friday prayers in a residential property (which has a minaret and a sign indicating that it is a mosque) and without submitting notification of the existence of a religious group

142 known "anti-missionary" prosecutions in 2019-20

At least 17 organisations and 125 individuals faced prosecution in 2019 and the first half of 2020 for "missionary activity" under Administrative Code Article 5.26, Parts 4 and 5. Over 90 per cent of cases ended with convictions. Nineteen of the 125 individuals were foreigners, 10 of whom were ordered deported. One such – Tajik citizen Fayzali Kholmurodov – is still in a detention centre in Tula Region six months after his conviction.

By Victoria Arnold

Forum 18 (19.08.2020) - <https://bit.ly/31sKUKs> - Individuals of almost every religious affiliation continue to face prosecution under Russia's "anti-missionary" legislation for exercising their right to freedom of religion and belief. Despite a 2018 Constitutional Court decision which offered some clarification of what "missionary activity" means, police and prosecutors continue to initiate cases to punish a wide range of activities, from advertising events online to holding ordinary worship services for fellow believers.

According to available court records, 142 prosecutions reached court between January 2019 and June 2020. Of these, 123 were under Administrative Code Article 5.26, Part 4 ("Russians conducting missionary activity"); and 19 under Article 5.26, Part 5 ("Foreigners conducting missionary activity") (see below).

The 142 prosecutions involved 125 individuals and 17 organisations. The majority resulted in guilty verdicts and fines, with a conviction rate across the 18-month period of 91 per cent (see below).

Ten of the foreign citizens convicted under Part 5 were also ordered deported from Russia, with five being sent to detention centres before their departure. One such detainee – 27-year-old Tajik citizen Fayzali Kholmurodov – is still in a detention centre in Tula Region six months after his February 2020 conviction, as the coronavirus pandemic has largely closed Tajikistan's borders (see below).

(See here for a full list of the 100 known cases in 2019 and 42 known cases in the first half of 2020.)

Religious organisations also continue to face prosecution under Administrative Code Article 5.26, Part 3. This punishes "Implementation of activities by a religious organisation without indicating its official full name, including the issuing or distribution, within the framework of missionary activity, of literature and printed, audio, and video material without a label bearing this name, or with an incomplete or deliberately false label" (see forthcoming F18News article).

In terms of overall numbers and case outcomes, the 2019-20 period differs little from 2018 (see below).

The number of prosecutions of individual Muslims and Muslim organisations has risen considerably, however. Muslims have now overtaken Protestants as the most likely to be taken to court for "unlawful missionary activity", Forum 18 has found. The activity for which most Muslims are prosecuted under Administrative Code Article 5.26, Parts 4 and 5 is simply conducting (or allowing) prayers on premises which are not officially designated places of worship (see below).

Despite the Constitutional Court's definition of "missionary activity", it appears that almost any religious activity may still make people vulnerable to prosecution (see below)

"Such broad interpretation of the concept of missionary activity makes it possible to qualify any dissemination of religious information and literature by an individual as unlawful missionary activity," lawyer Anatoly Pchelintsev commented in an article for the Moscow-based Slavic Centre for Law and Justice on 15 November 2019. "This creates a dangerous precedent of infringement on the legitimate rights and freedoms of believers, and serves as a basis for unjustified administrative prosecution."

"The confusion of the law and the inability of courts to sort out this situation give rise to perverse law enforcement practice and seriously violate the right of citizens to constitutional freedom of conscience," Pchelintsev added.

Background

On 6 July 2016, President Vladimir Putin signed amendments to the Religion Law imposing tight restrictions on the sharing of beliefs, including on where and by whom they may be shared. The amendments effectively ban broadly defined "missionary activity" by anyone without written permission from an officially recognised religious association, and apparently any activity performed by religious organisations not using their full legal names.

The amendments also prohibit "missionary activity" on residential premises, or by anyone who is a former member of an "extremist" religious organisation, and allow wide scope for arbitrary official actions.

The amendments were introduced as part of an "anti-terrorism" package proposed by United Russia Duma deputy Irina Yarovaya and Senator Viktor Ozerov. Protests against the changes were widespread.

A 2015 amendment to the Religion Law required all unregistered religious groups to notify the authorities (usually local branches of the Justice Ministry) of their existence and activities. This includes providing the names and addresses of all their members, and addresses where any meeting takes place.

Although no explicit punishment currently exists for not submitting this notification, Forum 18's analysis of prosecutions under Administrative Code Article 5.26, Parts 4 and 5, shows that failure to do is frequently taken as evidence of unlawful "missionary activity".

Punishments

Individuals and legal entities who violate any of the July 2016 restrictions and requirements are subject to punishment under Administrative Code Article 5.26, Part 3 ("Implementation of activities by a religious organisation without indicating its official full name, including the issuing or distribution, within the framework of missionary activity, of literature and printed, audio, and video material without a label bearing this name, or with an incomplete or deliberately false label"), Part 4 ("Russians conducting missionary activity"), or Part 5 ("Foreigners conducting missionary activity").

These were all signed into law at the same time.

Under Part 4 ("Russians conducting missionary activity"), Russian citizens are liable for a fine of 5,000 to 50,000 Roubles. For organisations (legal entities), the fine stands at

100,000 to 1 million Roubles. Religious groups, while they may share their beliefs in limited circumstances, are not legal entities – their members are therefore subject to prosecution as individuals.

Foreigners may be fined 30,000 to 50,000 Roubles for the same offence under Part 5 ("Foreigners conducting missionary activity"), with the possibility of expulsion from Russia.

Punishments under Part 3 ("Implementation of activities by a religious organisation without indicating its official full name, including the issuing or distribution, within the framework of missionary activity, of literature and printed, audio, and video material without a label bearing this name, or with an incomplete or deliberately false label") are a fine of 30,000 to 50,000 Roubles and possible confiscation of any materials (see forthcoming article).

A fine of 50,000 Roubles represents nearly six weeks' average wages for those in work or 16 weeks' average state retirement pension.

Statistics: January 2019 to June 2020

In an analysis of available court records, Forum 18 found a total of 142 prosecutions brought to court under Administrative Code Article 5.26, Parts 4 and 5 in the calendar year 2019 and the first six months of 2020. It is unknown how many other individuals and organisations may have faced charges, as cases against Russian citizens and legal entities (which comprise the vast majority) are heard in magistrates' courts, of which there are more than 7,000 across the country.

Establishing accurate figures is becoming increasingly difficult if communities or their members do not themselves make prosecutions known.

The 142 prosecutions found by Forum 18 involved 17 organisations and 125 individuals (some of them charged more than once for different incidents). Ten women and 103 men are known to have been brought to court, as well as two people whose gender is unknown.

A number of cases appear to be based on surveillance by the FSB security service – both of worship services and other events and of online activities. The FSB then informs prosecutors or police, who open administrative cases against the people or communities involved. Other cases may arise from routine prosecutor's office "inspections of compliance with the requirements" of the Religion Law and Extremism Law, or are triggered by calls to police or prosecutors from members of the public.

In 2019, there were:

- 85 prosecutions (15 of organisations, 70 of individuals) under Part 4 ("Russians conducting missionary activity");
- and 15 prosecutions under Part 5 ("Foreigners conducting missionary activity").

In the first six months of 2020, there were:

- 38 prosecutions (two of organisations, 36 of individuals) under Part 4;
- and four prosecutions under Part 5.

These figures show no significant change from 2018, which saw 90 prosecutions under Part 4 and 15 prosecutions under Part 5. The conviction rate also shows little change and remains high (see below).

Forum 18's analysis of prosecutions in the first half of 2020 shows slightly fewer cases being considered than might have been expected. This is likely to have resulted from restrictions on court functions imposed during Russia's coronavirus lockdown period.

Conviction rate stable

First instance courts convicted a total of 112 defendants and acquitted only twelve. Judges sent another eight cases back to police and prosecutors on technical grounds and closed a further five for unknown reasons. Five more cases were dropped because they reached court after the permitted time period for prosecutions had passed (the statute of limitations on administrative offences examined by a judge is three months).

This gives an initial conviction rate of 90.86 per cent across the 18 months from January 2019 to June 2020. This is similar to 2018's rate of 90 per cent. In 2016-17, this figure was 82 per cent.

Of those convicted in 2019-20, all but one were fined. One Muslim community, in the Republic of Kabardino-Balkariya, received a warning for conducting unspecified "missionary activity" in a house of culture (according to the verdict, "on premises it had no right to use", as it had only an oral agreement with a local administration staff member). The judge agreed that there had been no negative consequences. On appeal, the warning was overturned as the statute of limitations had expired.

Most Russian citizens charged under Article 5.26, Part 4 ("Russians conducting missionary activity") received fines of 5,000 Roubles (the minimum punishment available). In 2019, there were two fines of 6,000 Roubles and three of 10,000 Roubles (one of these was overturned on appeal), and a court imposed a fine of 35,000 Roubles on an imam who continued to lead prayers in a village mosque after he was dismissed from his post and expelled from the council of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the Adygeya Republic (the verdict did not mention the reason for his dismissal).

Organisations charged under Part 4 were fined between 50,000 Roubles (reduced because of mitigating factors) and 100,000 Roubles (the formal minimum).

Of the 19 prosecutions in 2019-20 under Article 5.26, Part 5 ("Foreigners conducting missionary activity"), fifteen resulted in the minimum fine of 30,000 Roubles and one in acquittal, while two cases were sent back to prosecutors for technical reasons (and not resubmitted) and one was closed because the statute of limitations had expired.

Ten people were also sentenced to deportation under Part 5 between January 2019 and June 2020, with five of them sent to detention centres before their departure (see below).

Few appeals successful

Defendants submitted initial appeals in 65 cases (either to district/city courts within ten days of the original verdict, or as supervisory appeals after the original ruling came into force – the latter were heard in regional courts up to October 2019, thereafter in one of nine newly established cassational courts which each caters to several federal subjects).

Of these initial appeals, 50 were unsuccessful and only 13 successful. One case was sent for re-examination, then closed as the statute of limitations had expired. The outcome of one appeal remains unknown.

Twelve defendants challenged their unsuccessful appeal rulings at the supervisory level. All of these were again unsuccessful (though one outcome is unknown).

Police and prosecutors lodged only seven appeals (five initial appeals and two supervisory), none of which succeeded.

Deportations on the rise?

Judges sentenced ten foreign citizens to deportation under Article 5.26, Part 5 in 2019 (eight) and the first half of 2020 (two), five of whom were sent to detention centres before being removed from the country. One man – Tajik citizen Fayzali Kholmurodov – is believed to be still in detention six months after his February 2020 conviction, because of border closures.

As well as being fined, foreigners found guilty under Article 5.26, Part 5 may also be ordered deported from Russia (administrativnoye vydvoreniye – under Russian law, this is technically different from deportatsiya, as it is punishment for an administrative offence imposed by a court ruling, while deportatsiya is decided on by the migration authorities or the FSB border service; they also differ procedurally).

Administrativnoye vydvoreniye may take the form of enforced expulsion, in which the defendant is held in an Interior Ministry detention centre until he or she can be sent out of Russia. Bailiffs are responsible for ensuring that this process is carried out. More often, defendants are subject to monitored independent departure, under which an individual remains free and makes his or her own way out of the country within a specified number of days after the ruling comes into force, under migration authorities' supervision.

Some judges decide not to deport defendants because their families are in Russia or – as in the case of a South Korean Protestant and postgraduate student at Omsk State University – because it would be "an excessive and unjustified measure".

Eight deportations in 2019, three with detention (plus two in the first half of 2020, both with detention) marks an increase on 2018, when only three foreign citizens were ordered deported (all by monitored independent departure), one of whom had the deportation order overturned on appeal.

In 2016-17, there were five deportation orders (three by monitored independent departure, two by enforced expulsion with detention). One of those detained successfully challenged his deportation and was immediately released.

Given that those deported are of six different nationalities and multiple religious affiliations (Muslim, Mormon, three different Evangelical churches, and one unknown), and that their cases were brought in seven different regions, it does not appear that any particular group is being targeted.

Twenty-seven-year-old Fayzali Kholmurodov was convicted at Donskoy City Court in Tula Region on 12 February 2020. The judge imposed a fine of 30,000 Roubles and ordered that he be expelled from Russia, and held in the region's detention centre for foreign nationals in Kimovsk until his departure. Staff told Forum 18 that Kholmurodov arrived at the detention centre on 13 February, and, because Tajikistan's borders have been almost entirely closed during the coronavirus pandemic, is still there six months later.

Like other Muslims prosecuted under Article 5.26, Parts 4 and 5, Kholmurodov was charged because he had led prayers (for migrant workers in their hostel) when no notification had been submitted of the existence of a religious group. Consequently, he had no written authorisation from a religious group to carry out missionary activity. There is no suggestion, however, that any non-Muslims were present.

The court verdict, seen by Forum 18, states only that Kholmurodov "took actions to disseminate information about his faith (Islam) among persons from the hostel who were not members of the religious group of employees of [company name redacted], in order to involve these persons as participants by addressing their consciousness, will, [and] feelings, including by means of disclosing [his] own religious views and beliefs".

Forum 18 found 15 prosecutions under Article 5.26, Part 5 in 2019, and four in the first half of 2020 – a total of 19. They comprised four US citizens, three Tajiks, three South Koreans, two Kazakhs, two Azerbaijanis, one Ukrainian, one Lebanese citizen, one Pole, and one Turk. The nationality of one person remains unknown.

Article 5.26 sometimes only one part of restrictions

The "anti-missionary" amendment is one of many pieces of civil and administrative legislation which may be used to restrict, monitor, and penalise the expression of freedom of religion and belief in Russia.

Individuals and their communities may face more than one kind of court case simultaneously or in quick succession. For example, Muslim convert Artur Rusyayev was charged (but acquitted) under Article 5.26, Part 4 for holding prayers in an "auxiliary" building on farmland owned by his wife, Irina Rusyayeva. This occurred in the midst of civil proceedings against the Rusyayevs, which ruled their prayer house – near Chernyakhovsk in Kaliningrad Region – an "unauthorised structure" and resulted in its demolition.

Similarly, Baptist Union pastor Yury Korniyenko was fined 10,000 Roubles under Article 5.26, Part 4 for leading a service in his community's church. The church met in a residential building owned by a church member in the village of Verkhnebakansky, on the outskirts of Novorossiysk (Krasnodar Region). This was despite the fact that no non-Baptists were present and that Korniyenko had written authorisation to perform missionary activity anyway. Novorossiysk city administration had banned the Baptists from using the building for religious purposes as its land plot lay within a "zone of education facilities and scientific complexes" established after its construction.

Religious profile – shift towards more prosecutions of Muslims?

Prosecutions between January 2019 and June 2020 involved individuals or organisations belonging to the following religious communities:

- Muslim – 62 (42 in 2019, 20 in 2020)
- Baptist (Council of Churches, Baptist Union, independent/unknown) – 29 (17, 12)
- Evangelical Protestant (including Pentecostals) – 22 (16, 6)
- Society for Krishna Consciousness (Hare Krishna) – 8 (8, 0)
- Methodist – 3 (3, 0)
- Catholic – 2 (1, 1)
- Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) – 2 (2, 0)
- Seventh-day Adventist – 2 (2, 0)
- Buddhist – 1 (1, 0)
- Unknown faith – 11 (8, 3)

This represents a considerable increase from 2018 in prosecutions of Muslim religious activity. In that year, police and prosecutors initiated only 14 such cases under Article 5.26, Part 4 or Part 5. It is unclear why such a sharp rise has occurred. Sergey Chugunov, a lawyer at the Slavic Centre for Law and Justice, has also noted the trend, he told Forum 18 on 6 August, but believes it is difficult to ascertain a reason for it.

Muslim-related cases show a wide geographical spread across 15 federal subjects – Adygeya Republic, Astrakhan Region, Chelyabinsk Region, Dagestan Republic, Republic of Kabardino-Balkariya, Kaliningrad Region, Kemerovo Region, Khabarovsk Region, Leningrad Region, Moscow Region, Rostov Region, St Petersburg, Tatarstan Republic, Tula Region, Ulyanovsk Region – with varying proportions of the population who are (at least nominally) Muslim.

The regions with the highest numbers of such prosecutions are: Dagestan – 13 (though these all derive from only two investigations); Rostov – 9; Chelyabinsk – 7; and Leningrad – 7.

Although most prosecutions for Muslim worship are of Russian citizens, they frequently occur as the result of police or prosecutor's office inspections of places where migrant workers are likely to be employed, such as construction sites and markets. Several prosecutions of Muslim foreign citizens also followed such inspections. Four cases were also associated with three cultural centres for people from Azerbaijan, Dagestan, and the Caucasus respectively, in St Petersburg and Leningrad Region.

On 28 October 2019, a Turkish construction company's Russian branch was fined 100,000 Roubles for allowing a digger driver to act as imam and lead Friday prayers for workers in their camp, without authorising documents from a religious organisation. According to the verdict from Tosnensky District Magistrate's Court No. 70 (Leningrad Region), the digger driver (who was himself convicted and fined 5,000 Roubles) "discussed and disseminated among [worshippers] information on his faith, 'Islam'" – multiple witness statements from attendees nevertheless describe only "group prayers".

Similarly, Tajik citizen Kurbonali Kakhorov was charged under Article 5.26, Part 5 for leading prayers for fellow labourers in a trailer on their building site, while "not being a mullah (imam) of a Muslim mosque, [and] officially not part of a religious organisation", and without either authorisation from a religious group or having submitted notification of the existence of a religious group. The judge at St Petersburg's Frunze District Court decided, however, that on the basis of the Constitutional Court's 2018 definition, Kakhorov had not conducted any missionary activity, and acquitted him on 30 May 2019.

First Catholic and Methodist prosecutions

In another potential shift, 2019 and the first half of 2020 also saw the first prosecutions known to Forum 18 of Catholics and Methodists under Article 5.26, Part 4 or 5 (Catholic and Methodist churches have already faced prosecution under Article 5.26, Part 3).

Leningrad District Court in Kaliningrad fined Polish citizen Fr Andrzej Zalewski, priest of the Nativity Catholic Church of the Byzantine Rite, 30,000 Roubles under Article 5.26, Part 5, for conducting the Liturgy of St John Chrysostom on premises belonging to the Caritas-West charity. According to the verdict of 17 September 2019, police patrol officers noticed "loud music" and "suspicious citizens" coming from the property. Fr Zalewski had lodged an application to register the parish as a religious organisation three days before the police visit, but it had not yet been approved, thereby rendering the church's lease invalid.

On 12 February 2020, Nikita Glazunov, leader of a traditionalist Catholic religious group, the Society of Saint Pius X, was fined 5,000 Roubles at Vakhitovsky District Magistrate's Court No. 8 in Kazan (Republic of Tatarstan). He had organised a Latin Mass in a hotel conference hall, served by a "foreign preacher" who did not have written authorisation from the group to perform missionary activity. According to the verdict, a witness testified that the preacher had "spoken of the truth of Catholicism in comparison with

Orthodox Christianity", and that Glazunov had "approached him and invited him to take printed materials to familiarise himself with their religious views".

The Methodist Church of stantsiya Ugolnaya in Primorye Region was fined 100,000 Roubles on 15 May 2019 for organising the Far Eastern Conference for Children's Ministers without a formal lease on the sanatorium used. Because the delegates included members of different churches and people who had not specified their religious affiliation, Soviet District Magistrate's Court No. 24 in Vladivostok concluded that the conference constituted "missionary activity".

Oleg Kuzin, pastor of Ryazan Wesleyan Church, and his acquaintance Fyodor Makarov were fined 5,000 Roubles each at October District Magistrate's Court No. 18 for distributing Gideon bibles outside a university. This was despite their arguments that the New Testament was common to all Christians and they were not attempting to involve anyone in any religious association. Because both did, in fact, have written authorisation to carry out missionary activity, they were acquitted on appeal.

Geographical spread

Thirty-eight of Russia's 83 federal subjects saw at least one prosecution under Article 5.26, Parts 4 and 5 between January 2019 and June 2020 (33 in 2019, 15 in 2020), not counting Russian-annexed Crimea and Sevastopol. The highest numbers of prosecutions were in Krasnodar Region (14), the Dagestan Republic (13), Chelyabinsk Region (12), Rostov Region (9), Ryazan Region (8), and Leningrad Region (8).

The Dagestan prosecutions were derived from two investigations. The first was of ten Muslims charged for giving Arabic language and Koran lessons at a mosque in Makhachkala. The second was of three Muslims charged for teaching Arabic and the Koran (as well as handicrafts and arithmetic) at a children's centre in the Botlikh district.

(The Russian occupying authorities in Crimea and Sevastopol frequently use Article 5.26, Part 4 to punish the exercise of freedom of religion or belief. At least 24 such prosecutions are known to have been launched in 2019, of which 17 ended with punishment.)

Impact of March 2018 Constitutional Court definition only minor

On 13 March 2018, the Constitutional Court issued an interpretation of some of the legal norms in the "anti-missionary" legislation. "A defining feature [sistemoobrazuyushchy признак] of missionary activity," it declared, "is the dissemination, by citizens and their associations, of information about a specific religious belief among persons who, not being its followers, are involved in their number, including as participants in specific religious associations."

Therefore, the distribution of information, for example, about meetings for worship, ceremonies, or events "falls under the definition of missionary activity as such, only if it contains the said defining feature".

The Constitutional Court concluded that establishing whether missionary activity has been carried out requires "the identification of all the signs of missionary activity specified in [the Religion Law]". If any is absent, the religious activity "cannot qualify as missionary activity in the sense of the [Religion Law], and therefore, even if it is committed in violation of the requirements of the [Religion Law], it does not constitute an offence as stipulated in Administrative Code Article 5.26, Part 4 ["Russians conducting missionary activity"]".

This appears to be having a discernible but still limited impact on prosecutions under Article 5.26, Part 4. Forum 18 found eight explicit mentions of it in written verdicts (first instance and appeal), as well as five rulings in which its principles were evidently at least acknowledged. In four of these cases (three first instance, one appeal), it did not prevent judges from reaching a guilty verdict.

The Constitutional Court's definition did lead to acquittal for eight defendants (and was mentioned by the judge in the closing of another case for technical reasons). For example, Society for Krishna Consciousness adherent T. Kulichenko appeared at Miass Magistrate's Court No. 9 (Chelyabinsk Region) on 21 January 2019, charged with speaking to an audience at a yoga studio and chanting mantras "aimed at disseminating information about his faith, Krishnaism (Vaishnavism), among persons who were not participants in this religious group, in order to involve them in the group's membership", without authorisation from a religious group and without submitting notification of the existence of a religious group. Referring to the Constitutional Court's definition, the judge concluded that "In itself, the holding of a religious event, in the opinion of the court, does not indicate that the organisers are pursuing the goal of involving those present in the composition of any religious association", and acquitted Kulichenko.

Baptist G. Makiyev was charged under Article 5.26, Part 4 for leaving copies of the magazine "Faith and life" on a table in a property where he was doing building work, with a sign saying that anyone who wished could take one. Makiyev's lawyer pointed out that the magazine contained writing by Protestant, Catholic and Orthodox authors, as well as art and fiction. In acquitting Makiyev on 27 January 2020, the judge at Maysky District Magistrate's Court No. 1 (Republic of Kabardino-Balkariya) cited the March 2018 definition and noted that there was no evidence that Makiyev had carried out (or aimed to carry out) any activities aimed at disseminating information about any religion in a public place.

While 13 cases mentioning the Constitutional Court definition (11 in 2019, two so far in 2020) represents an increase on 2018 (when this figure was seven), the impact still appears to be minor.

"Difficulties remain in law enforcement practice," lawyer Sergey Chugunov remarked to Forum 18 on 6 August. "Despite the fact that the Constitutional Court indicated that not all activities of a religious organisation are missionary, in practice the [magistrates' and district] courts make no distinction, recognising all religious activities as missionary. Therefore, this problem remains, and the number of such cases, if it is decreasing, is only due to the fact that citizens have become more careful."

Interpretation of the law remains broad

Despite the Constitutional Court's 2018 definition of "missionary activity" and its consideration by some judges, Article 5.26, Parts 4 and 5 offer officials many ways to punish the exercise of freedom of religion or belief.

Firstly, investigators and prosecutors can still apply the concept of "missionary activity" indiscriminately. Secondly, officials frequently appear to disregard even the broad definition provided by the Religion Law in favour of finding tangential violations, such as the lack of notification of a religious group's creation, even when no religious group exists. Thirdly, the anti-missionary amendment is based on the presumption that all religious activity should take place within the parameters of a formally constituted religious organisation or group, and this has the effect of penalising individual expressions of freedom of religion and belief.

In commentary for the Slavic Centre for Law and Justice on 5 July 2019, Mikhail Shakhov, President of the Guild of Experts on Religion and Law, points out that no legal definitions exist of the terms "member", "participant", and "follower" – all used in the anti-missionary amendment. He also points out that no formal process exists of making a person a member of a religious association (unless they are one of the "founder members" (uchrediteli) named in an organisation's charter).

This, Shakhov argues, "opens up ample opportunities for circumventing the provisions" of Article 2, Paragraph 3 of the Religion Law, which declares that "nothing in the legislation on freedom of conscience, freedom of religion, and religious associations should be interpreted in the sense of diminishing or infringing upon the rights of person and citizen to freedom of conscience and freedom of religion, as guaranteed by the Constitution of the Russian Federation or arising from international treaties of the Russian Federation".

Shakhov notes that the law implies that the outcome of missionary activity is the inclusion of a person in the membership of a religious association – so if someone is persuaded to follow Islam, for example, but does not join a specific association, the process of persuasion is not technically missionary activity. This has led to police and prosecutors "'correcting' the deficiencies of the law" by assuming any dissemination of beliefs to be missionary activity.

The example of a Buddhist leader's prosecution in Sochi shows how far the interpretation of "missionary activity" can stray even from the wide-ranging concept outlined in the Religion Law. Khostinsky Magistrate's Court No. 99 fined Igor Darayev 5,000 Roubles on 7 February 2019 for organising "collective meditation" in a boathouse for "about a dozen" fellow Buddhists, without written authorisation from a religious association to carry out missionary activity.

"The organiser of the gatherings did not actively attract new followers and did not promote his activities in the media; a small circle of people met for meditation", a prosecutor's office spokesperson told "Kommersant" newspaper on 13 February 2019. "Nevertheless, [Darayev's] activities are in fact missionary, which presumes the registration of a religious association with the Justice Ministry."

Basis for prosecutions

The most common ground for prosecution (60 cases) is a lack of written authorisation from a religious organisation or group to carry out missionary activity on its behalf. This assumes, firstly, that everyone carrying out missionary activity must be representing a formally constituted religious association, rather than simply sharing their own beliefs (several defendants appear not to be members of any association); and secondly, that any activity which individuals might perform on behalf of (or merely in connection with) their religious communities is inherently "missionary".

Almost as common (52 cases) is the failure to submit notification to a regional branch of the Justice Ministry of the existence of a religious group (see below).

Among the cases found by Forum 18, other reasons given in verdicts include: missionary activity on residential property – 17 cases; no right to use the premises (e.g. by ownership, lease, agreement of free use) – 16 cases; an individual's lack/loss of position as official representative or clergy – 3 cases; missionary activity on another religious organisation's property – one case (although both organisations were Muslim and their relationship is unclear); missionary activity among minors without parental consent – one case.

In more than 30 cases, it was impossible to ascertain what reason police or prosecutors had for initiating the prosecution, because no written court decision was available, the court decision lacked detail, or the judge deemed there to be no grounds at all, and therefore decided on acquittal.

These figures add up to more than the total number of prosecutions because police and prosecutors often cite multiple violations. The commonest combination is a failure to submit notification of the existence of a religious group and (consequently) a lack of written authorisation from a defendant's (often non-existent) religious group to carry out missionary activity.

Lack of religious group notification

Apart from the lack of written authorisation, the commonest reason behind the prosecution of individuals is a presumed failure to submit notification of the existence of a religious group (even if the defendant is not in fact a member of any religious group).

This is a particular problem for both independent and Council of Churches Baptists, as well as, increasingly, for Muslims meeting to pray in homes or workplaces. Council of Churches Baptists refuse on principle to seek any kind of state registration, and argued publicly against the restrictions imposed by the introduction of the group notification requirement in 2015.

On many occasions, there appears to be no reason that an individual should have deemed notification necessary, e.g. when no group with consistent membership and regular meetings exists at all, or when worship involves only casual gatherings of friends at home.

There were 52 prosecutions for this lack of notification (36 in 2019 and 16 in the first half of 2020). The calendar year 2018 saw 39 such prosecutions, while there were 24 in 2016-17.

"It is difficult to say whether or not a majority of cases are related to non-notification of group creation, but this is a big problem," lawyer Sergey Chugunov told Forum 18 on 6 August. "The legislation contains no specified point at which a group is considered created. This is a gap. Therefore, anything is considered to be a religious group and fined."

Most cases based on lack of notification arise either because individuals (usually groups of acquaintances in someone's home) hold collective meetings for prayer outside formal places of worship, or because of activities (often one-off actions) which an individual might reasonably assume could not be interpreted as "missionary activity".

Police and prosecutors initiated 47 prosecutions in 2019-20 under Article 5.26, Parts 4 and 5 solely or principally for worship. Sixteen of these were for worship on residential premises. (Article 24.1, Paragraph 3 of the Religion Law explicitly forbids "missionary activity" on residential premises, with the exception of activities covered by Article 16 Paragraph 2, namely "Services, rites, and ceremonies", which are explicitly permitted.)

Individuals prosecuted included a Baptist Union pastor who held services on the third floor of his own house and a Muslim charged for praying with relatives and acquaintances "who had professed Islam since childhood", again in his own home.

CRIMEA: Mosque closed as "There is no community there"?

Officials have closed the mosque in Zavetnoye in Sovetsky District of eastern Crimea, which was handed to the community in 2004. Police and plain clothes officers raided it in March. In April, a court fined Imam Dilyaver Khalilov for leading Friday prayers. Asked how the Muslim community should worship now the authorities are seizing their place of worship, Emil Velilyayev, deputy head of Sovetsky District, responded: "There is no community there."

By Felix Corley

Forum 18 (18.08.2020) - <https://bit.ly/2QsOCNG> - Officials have already declared closed an independent mosque in the village of Zavetnoye in Sovetsky District of eastern Crimea, raided by police and plain clothes officers in March. They insist the mosque the community was given, has repaired and has been using since 2004 is not a mosque but a sports complex. In July, the mosque's Imam Dilyaver Khalilov failed to overturn a fine handed down in April for leading Friday prayers.

Asked by Forum 18 how the Muslim community in Zavetnoye should worship now that the authorities are seizing their place of worship, Emil Velilyayev, deputy head of Sovetsky District, responded: "There is no community there" (see below).

A second independent mosque community – which has worshipped in the 19th century Yukhary-Jami mosque in the southern Crimean town of Alushta since 1994 – faces the seizure of its place of worship. The community's last-ditch appeal against the seizure is now in the Russian Supreme Court (see below).

The mosque community is challenging a 2018 Crimean Council of Ministers decision which handed control of the Yukhary-Jami mosque to Crimea's State Committee for Inter-ethnic Relations and Deported Citizens. The community points to decisions in 1994 and 1996 which handed the mosque to the community (see below).

On 10 June, a Magistrate's Court in Alushta found the mosque's Imam, Yusuf Ashirov, guilty of conducting "illegal missionary activity" by leading prayers and preaching in Yukhary-Jami mosque. Alushta City Court rejected his appeal on 14 August (see below).

On 22 July, Crimea's Justice Ministry wrote to the Alushta Muslim community with an official warning about "extremism". It demanded that the community should remove its leader Ruslan Emirvaliyev from among the founders, pointing to an Alushta City Court fine on him for posting an image online that prosecutors considered "extremist". If the community fails to remove him, officials will regard it as "extremist" (see below).

Threats to places of worship continue against other religious communities as well. Courts in Crimea have ordered the expulsion of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine cathedral currently housed in a building in the centre of the Crimean capital Simferopol. Officials claim its small wooden chapel in the western Crimean city of Yevpatoriya was built illegally and has ordered the community to destroy it.

The Orthodox Church of Ukraine appealed to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg, which has asked the Russian government to provide information by 24 August about the actions they intend to take (see forthcoming F18News article).

Russia's March 2014 annexation of Crimea is not recognised by Ukraine or internationally. Since the Russian occupation, raids and prosecutions of Muslims (most of whom are Crimean Tatars) and Jehovah's Witnesses have been frequent.

Zavetnoye: Mosque declared closed

Officials have declared closed an independent mosque in the village of Zavetnoye in Sovetsky District of eastern Crimea, known as Savurchi Mosque after the Crimean Tatar name of the village. Police and plain clothes officials raided the mosque after Friday prayers on 20 March. They insist the mosque the community repaired and has been using for 16 years is not a mosque but a sports complex.

"Officials closed the mosque immediately after the raid, telling the people that no one can go in there to pray," the lawyer Emil Kurbedinov told Forum 18 from the Crimean capital Simferopol on 3 August.

The mosque community first gained registration with the Ukrainian authorities in 2000. Zavetnoye Village Council handed over to the community a former sports building of about 130 square metres (1,400 sq. feet) as a mosque in 2004. The building is next to a sports field. The community repaired and rebuilt the run-down building with its own resources.

The building used as the mosque is one of several structures in the centre of the village collectively entered in the Russian cadastral register as a sports complex, on land designated as being "For the placement of objects of physical culture and sport".

Local officials defended the enforced closure, which was unrelated to measures to counter the coronavirus pandemic. "Worship there is banned," Olga Fisenko, head of Zavetnoye Village Council, told Forum 18 on 17 August. Asked why, she responded: "The building is not their property." Told that the community was given the building in 2004 and has been worshipping there over the 16 years since then, she added: "They're not registered."

Fisenko refused to answer any other questions and referred Forum 18 to Emil Velilyayev, deputy head of Sovetsky District, where the village of Zavetnoye is located.

Velilyayev insisted that the mosque building is a sports complex. Told by Forum 18 on 17 August that the Village Council allocated the building to the community in 2004 when it was half-ruined, and it was then restored and rebuilt by the community with its own resources, he responded: "It must be registered, and it is not. People must visit an officially-registered mosque."

Asked why the community cannot use the place of worship it has been using since 2004, Velilyayev responded: "They don't have documentation for the building, whether under Ukrainian or Russian law."

Asked how the Muslim community in Zavetnoye should worship now that the authorities are seizing their place of worship, Velilyayev responded: "There is no community there."

Zavetnoye: Imam fined for Friday prayers

Imam Dilyaver Khalilov has failed to overturn a fine handed down in April for leading Friday prayers in the Zavetnoye mosque, which the court found to be an illegal meeting. On 6 July, Judge Oksana Shidakova of Crimea's Supreme Court in Simferopol rejected his appeal, according to the decision seen by Forum 18.

Trouble for the Imam began on 20 March, when police and plain clothes officials arrived at the mosque just after Friday prayers. They prevented worshippers from leaving and questioned them.

Officers told mosque members they were conducting an investigation about alleged "missionary activity", reading out the relevant Article 24.2 of Russia's Religion Law. They pressured the Imam to write a statement and promised they would later be in contact with him. Only one of the police officers, Valentin Shostak, gave his name.

Forum 18 reached police officer Shostak on 7 April, but he put the phone down as soon as it asked him about the raid.

The Prosecutor of Sovetsky District, Dmitry Bailema, summoned mosque leader Khalilov for questioning on 1 April, according to the summons seen by Forum 18. The summons related to a prosecution under Russian Administrative Code Article 5.26, Part 4 ("Russians conducting missionary activity") following an "inspection" on the mosque in the village of Zavetnoye.

Article 5.26, Part 4 punishes "Russians conducting missionary activity" and incurs a fine of 5,000 to 50,000 Roubles. For organisations (legal entities), the fine is 100,000 to 1 million Roubles. Average monthly wages in Crimea for those in formal work are about 30,000 Roubles.

The Russian occupying authorities in Crimea frequently use Article 5.26, Part 4 to punish the exercise of freedom of religion or belief. At least 24 such prosecutions are known to have been launched in 2019, of which 17 ended with punishment.

However, the summons to Imam Khalilov was then cancelled because of the coronavirus outbreak, the lawyer Lilia Hemedzhy told Forum 18 on 7 April.

Prosecutor Bailema's phone went unanswered each time Forum 18 called on 7 April.

Sovetsky District Prosecutors summoned Imam Khalilov on 15 April, where they informed him he was facing charges under Russian Administrative Code Article 5.26, Part 4.

Sovetsky District Prosecutors again summoned Imam Khalilov on 22 April, who was accompanied by his lawyers Nazim Sheikmambetov and Emil Kurbedinov. Prosecutors told the Imam that they had dropped charges under Russian Administrative Code Article 5.26, Part 4. However, they said they were instead accusing him under Russian Administrative Code Article 20.2, Part 2 ("Violation of the established procedure for organising or conducting a gathering, meeting, demonstration, procession or picket"), which is linked to Russia's Demonstrations Law.

Prosecutors claimed that "the conducting of Friday prayers does not represent the carrying out of a compulsory religious rite", the lawyer Kurbedinov told the human rights monitoring group Crimean Solidarity the same day, "but rather that people gathered there to hold a meeting."

Because the mosque community has not been re-registered under Russian law, Prosecutors insisted that Friday prayers in the mosque represent an unapproved meeting. Kurbedinov considered it "absurd" that Imam Khalilov should have to go to the Village Council each time to ask permission to hold prayers.

Kurbedinov also pointed to procedural violations, including over Imam Khalilov's request for a translator from Russian into Crimean Tatar. Officials provided a translator.

"However, when Dilyaver Khalilov asked for the indictment to be translated for him, the Prosecutor's Office refused."

The lawyer Kurbedinov also complained that the Deputy Prosecutor was secretly filming the interview. "After repeated demands, he stopped his covert filming," Kurbedinov told Crimean Solidarity.

On 29 April, Judge Igor Brazhnik of Sovetsky District Court found Imam Khalilov guilty under Russian Administrative Code Article 20.2, Part 2 ("Violation of the established procedure for organising or conducting a gathering, meeting, demonstration, procession or picket") and fined him 30,000 Russian Roubles, according to the decision seen by Forum 18. This is about one month's average wage in Crimea for those in formal work.

Alushta: "Brought to court for conducting the juma namaz"

Imam Khalilov "has been brought to court for conducting the juma namaz [Friday prayers] in a mosque which has been functioning for 16 years," the lawyer Kurbedinov told Crimean Solidarity after the 29 April Sovetsky District Court hearing. "And suddenly it turns out that it is not a mosque but some kind of sports complex, and he is not an imam of a mosque but a law-breaker."

Kurbedinov said he had tried unsuccessfully to have brought to court as witnesses those who were present in the mosque on 20 March when it was raided and Village Council officials who had given only written testimony. He had also tried to have called to court Mufti Emirali Ablayev, head of the Crimean Muftiate, who had been involved in the official formation of the community in 2004.

Another of Imam Khalilov's lawyers, Rustem Kyamilev, had presented documentation to the court showing the community's official registration under Ukrainian law in 2004 and its continuing functioning in the same building over 16 years.

Imam Khalilov's third lawyer, Lilia Hemedzhy, insisted that the Russian authorities are deliberately targeting religious organisations for destruction. She pointed out that Prosecutor Bailema told the court that on 20 March, he and the police came to the mosque "not to prevent, not to stop law-breaking, but to check up on a religious organisation", she told Crimean Solidarity. "This was the main aim."

Hemedzhy noted that the Prosecutor's Office had no information that the mosque was a sports complex. However, they did know that Friday prayers were held there.

Imam Khalilov appealed against the conviction and fine to Crimea's Supreme Court in Simferopol. Lawyer Kurbedinov said outside the court immediately after the 6 July hearing that the decision to leave the lower court decision unchanged was predictable. He complained that the court, which claimed it was an open hearing, had not allowed in the 20 or so men from the mosque community who had hoped to attend. Court officials claimed this was because of the coronavirus pandemic.

Kurbedinov also complained that the decision to reject Imam Khalilov's appeal had already been taken before the hearing. The decision "was lying on the table in sight of the judge. It had already been completed – everything was already decided in advance a long time ago, it seems a month or two ago."

Kurbedinov pledged to take the case to international bodies, including the United Nations human rights bodies.

Alushta: Community challenges threatened mosque seizure

The community of the independent Yukhary-Jami mosque in the southern Crimean town of Alushta is challenging in Russia's Supreme Court a decision to revoke their ownership and declare their mosque building state property.

"The mosque functions, and is still in the hands of the community – thank God," the community's lawyer Lilia Hemedzhy told Forum 18 from Simferopol on 3 August. "The community closed the mosque in March because of the coronavirus pandemic."

The community is challenging a Crimean Council of Ministers decision of 18 September 2018 which handed control of Yukhary-Jami mosque to Crimea's State Committee for Inter-ethnic Relations and Deported Citizens. The community pointed to decisions in 1994 and 1996 which handed the historical mosque to the community.

The community brought the suit also against the Crimean Muslim Board. Community members fear that the authorities wish to transfer the mosque for its use.

On 14 February 2019, Alushta City Court rejected the community's suit against the 2018 decision to overturn their ownership and declare their mosque building state property. On 25 June 2019, Crimea's Supreme Court rejected the community's appeal against this decision.

The community gained legal registration in 1993 under Ukrainian law and re-registration in August 2016 as an independent religious organisation after the Russian annexation of Crimea, according to Russian tax records.

However, the Crimean Supreme Court rejected the community's arguments, insisting that the mosque was state property and that the Crimean Council of Ministers therefore had the right to issue the decision, according to the court decision seen by Forum 18.

The community lodged the case at Russia's Supreme Court on 30 June 2020, but on 6 July the Court returned it, citing "inadequacies" in the appeal, according to court records. The community resubmitted the appeal on 28 July, but the Court has not yet set a date for a hearing.

The community has worshipped in Alushta's 19th century Yukhary-Jami mosque building since 1994. Yusuf Ashirov chaired the community from 2001, and then became Imam in 2014.

"The 1994 decision to grant us the mosque has never been cancelled," Imam Ashirov told Forum 18 in April. "How can they adopt a new decision without cancelling the old?"

Alushta: Punished for "missionary activity" in own mosque

Prosecutors brought an administrative case against Imam Yusuf Ashirov, accusing him of violating Russian Administrative Code Article 5.26, Part 4, by leading prayers and preaching in Yukhary-Jami mosque. Prosecutors informed him of the charges when they summoned him on 1 April.

Article 5.26, Part 4 punishes "Russians conducting missionary activity". This incurs a fine of 5,000 to 50,000 Roubles. For organisations (legal entities), the fine is 100,000 to 1 million Roubles.

On 10 June, Judge Svetlana Vlasova of Alushta Magistrate's Court No. 22 found Imam Ashirov guilty and fined him 5,000 Russian Roubles, according to court records. This is several days' average wage in Crimea for those in formal work.

On 14 August, Judge Tatyana Zakharova of Alushta City Court rejected Imam Ashirov's appeal against his punishment, according to court records.

Imam Ashirov's lawyer Rustem Kyamilev said after the appeal hearing that he intends to take his client's case further. "The Judge indicated that the basis for rejecting my appeal was that I had not confirmed his responsibilities with appropriate documentation," he told human rights monitoring group Crimean Solidarity. "She similarly left Yusuf Ashirov's own appeal without consideration, claiming that it was incomplete and unfounded."

Lawyer Kyamilev linked the case against Imam Ashirov to other state pressure on Muslim communities not subordinated to the Crimean Muslim Board.

Lawyer Lilia Hemedzhy, who defended community leader Ruslan Emirvaliyev (see below), said FSB officers had prepared the case against Imam Ashirov.

Alushta: Fined for "extremism"

On 14 August, the head of the Alushta mosque community Ruslan Emirvaliyev paid a fine handed down in May for a post on his VKontakte social media page in 2016.

In a video recorded outside a bank, posted online by Crimean Solidarity the same day, Emirvaliyev said that he had been punished for posting a picture of a young boy pointing upwards with his right index finger in front of an Arabic inscription that there is no God but God, and that Muhammad is his prophet. He thanked those who had helped him pay the fine.

Mikhail Didun of Alushta Prosecutor's Office summoned Emirvaliyev in late May to inform him that it had opened an administrative case against him on accusations of promoting "extremism".

Alushta Prosecutor's Office refused to put Forum 18 through to Didun on 18 August.

On 28 May, Judge Tatyana Zakharova of Alushta City Court found Emirvaliyev guilty under Russian Administrative Code Article 20.3, Part 1 ("Propaganda of Nazi symbolism or symbolism of an extremist organisation"). She fined him 1,000 Russian Roubles, the minimum punishment under Article 20.3, Part 1. This is about one day's average wage in Crimea for those in formal work.

Emirvaliyev's lawyer Lilia Hemedzhy declared after the hearing that materials in the case had been prepared by the FSB security service and feared that the case was part of a wider move against the mosque. "This administrative case is, I think, the basis for something larger, for the persecution of this community as a whole, for the persecution of people here in Alushta." She said FSB officers had similarly prepared the case against Imam Ashirov.

In his 14 August remarks, Emirvaliyev insisted that the mosque community is "large, unbreakable and indivisible".

Alushta: Justice Ministry demands mosque leader's ousting

On 22 July, Mikhail Nazarov, head of Crimea's Justice Ministry, wrote to the Alushta Muslim community with an official warning about "extremism", citing Russia's 2002 Extremism Law. The warning - seen by Forum 18 - was prepared by Konstantin Yelnikov, a specialist at the Ministry's Non-Commercial Organisations Department.

The Justice Ministry demanded that the community should remove acting leader Emirvaliyev from among the founders, pointing to the 28 May Alushta City Court decision against him. The Justice Ministry gave the mosque community until 30 September to remove Emirvaliyev.

Article 15 of Russia's Extremism Law says that if any leader or member of a public or religious organisation's leadership makes a "public statement calling for the carrying out of extremist activity" and the organisation does not disavow it within five days, this could be seen as "testimony of the presence in [the organisation's] activity of signs of extremism".

The Russian tax record for the mosque community notes that it first gained state registration (under Ukraine) in April 1993. The community was re-registered under Russian law in August 2016. Emirvaliyev is listed as the chair of the religious organisation.

Yelnikov, the specialist at the Non-Commercial Organisations Department, insists that the demand for the mosque community to remove Emirvaliyev is in line with Russian law and the court decision against him. "He can't be among the founders," Yelnikov told Forum 18 from Simferopol on 18 August.

Yelnikov said the mosque community has not appealed against the official warning. "The deadline has not yet run out," he noted.

Special bimonthly FORB digest (01-15.08.2020)

14.08.20 - Synagogues resume their work in Russian cities

Moscow, August 14, Interfax - Synagogues return to their work in usual format in 15 cities of Russia, including St. Petersburg, Irkutsk, Nizhny Novgorod, Volgograd, Perm, Kaluga, Samara, Khabarovsk and others, press service of the Federation of Jewish Communities of Russia told the journalists on Friday.

[Continue reading...](#)

13.08.20 - In Stavropol territory, law enforcers planted banned literature on the believer. Details of searches in Nevinnomysk

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2020/08/5.html>

During house searches in Nevinnomysk on August 10, 2020, law enforcers planted books on the Federal List of [Extremist Literature](#) (FSEM) to believers. Another believer's laptop and phone were seized.

[Continue reading...](#)

11.08.20 - Jehovah's Witnesses indicted in extreme far east of Russia

Link to full text in Russian: <https://news.ussurbator.ru/news/troih-svideteley-iegovy-budut-sudit-v-ussuriyske>

The Investigation Department has completed the investigation of the criminal case against three residents of Ussuriisk, who are charged with setting up a religious organization that has been ruled on Russian territory to be extremist, the news agency UssurMedia reports, citing the investigation department of the Investigative Committee of Russia [S.K.R.] for the Primorie territory.

[Continue reading...](#)

10.08.20 - In Rostov and Kursk regions at least 12 searches took place. Four believers were sent to the detention center for religious views

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2020/08/4.html>

On August 8, 2020 at least 12 local believers were searched in the cities of Gukovo, Kamensk-Shakhtinsky, Rostov-on-Don and Kursk. The next day, 51-year-old Oleg Shidlovsky, 40-year-old Evgeny Razumov, 39-year-old Alexei Gorely and 30-year-old Nikita Moiseyev were sent to the pre-trial detention center.

[Continue reading...](#)

10.08.20 - Tablighi Jamaat literature found in mosques in Mordovia, activists detained

Officials from the Russian Federal Security Service's Directorate for Mordovia, in interaction with the police and the Russian Guard, have stopped the activities of a group of activists of the international religious-extremist organization, *Tablighi Jamaat*, which is banned in Russia.

[Continue reading...](#)

09.08.20 - Jehovah's Witnesses locked up without bail for two months

Link to full text in Russian: <https://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/352861/>

Believers Aleksei Gorely, Evgeny Pazumov, Nikita Moiseev, and Oleg Shidlovsky were placed in detention until 6 October. This decision was made today [Sunday] by a Rostov court. All four were arrested yesterday during a series of searches in homes of Jehovah's Witnesses.

[Continue reading...](#)

07.08.20 - Voronezh troops using torture on Jehovah's Witnesses

Link to full text in Russian: <https://credo.press/232381/>

Voronezh Jehovah's Witnesses Yury Galka and Anatoly Yagupov described inhumane treatment on the part of personnel of law enforcement agencies through their lawyer, who visited them in a SIZO.

[Continue reading...](#)

07.08.20 - Teenage girl dies in Sredneuralsky Convent in Russia's Ural region

Yekaterinburg, August 7, Interfax - A 15-year-old girl has died in the Sredneuralsky Convent, Sverdlovsk Region children's rights commissioner Igor Morokov told *Interfax*.

[Continue reading...](#)

07.08.20 - Six Jehovah's Witnesses face trial in Sverdlovsk region

Link to full text in Russian: <https://www.znak.com/2020-08-07/>

The Sverdlovsk oblast court overturned the sentences for three Jehovah's Witnesses (an organization ruled to be extremist and forbidden in R.F.) from Karpinsk and sent back their criminal case for a new consideration in the Karpinsk city court.

[Continue reading...](#)

06.08.20 - Jehovah's Witnesses win appeal in Sverdlovsk region

Link to full text in Russian: <https://www.znak.com/2020-08-07/>

The Sverdlovsk oblast court overturned the sentences for three Jehovah's Witnesses (an organization ruled to be extremist and forbidden in R.F.) from Karpinsk and sent back their criminal case for a new consideration in the Karpinsk city court.

[Continue reading...](#)

05.08.20 - Russia is purging Ukrainian Orthodox presence in Crimea

Link to full text in Russian: <https://risu.ua/ru/>

Attorney Sergei Zaets thinks that the liquidation of the Ukrainian Orthodox community in occupied Crimea borders on genocide. This is how he commented on the refusal by the Russian Supreme Court to retain the P.Ts.U. [Orthodox Church of Ukraine] cathedral in Simferopol.

[Continue reading...](#)

04.08.20 - Protestant preacher punished for violating anti-evangelism law

Link to full text in Russian: <https://www.invictory.org/news/society/>

The presbyter of a Zakamensk church, the "Application" Church of Evangelical Christians-Baptists in the republic of Buryatia (Russia), was fined for "illegal" preaching, the Christian mega-portal invictory.com reports, with reference to credo.press.

[Continue reading...](#)

04.08.20 - Year-long trial of Jehovah's Witnesses interrupted by judge

Judge Vera Pismennaia of the Industrialnyi district court of Khabarovsk ordered the return to the prosecutor's office of the case against Jehovah's Witnesses Stanislav Kim, Nikolai Polevodov, Tatiana and Vitaly Zhuk, Svetlana Sedovaia, and Main Karpushkina.

[Continue reading...](#)

03.08.20 - Six and half years in penal colony replaced by suspended sentence for Pskov Jehovist

Link to full text in Russian: <https://7x7-journal.ru/news/2020/08/03/>

The Pskov oblast court replaced real prison time with a suspended sentence for 61-year-old Jehovah's Witness Gennady Shpakovsky, 7x7 was told at the court's administration.

[Continue reading...](#)

03.08.20 - Court replaces real imprisonment for Pskov Jehovah's witnesses with suspended sentence

Link to full text in Russian: <https://pskov.bezformata.com/listnews/sud-zamenil-realnoe-zaklyuchenie/86116833/>

A court replaced real-time imprisonment for Pskov Jehovah's Witness Gennady Shpakovsky, who was sentenced to 6.5 years in a penal colony, with a suspended sentence, Severo-Zapad MBKh Media writes.

[Continue reading...](#)

01.08.20 - Ukrainian politician points to European political thrust

Link to full text in Russian: <https://risu.ua/ru/>

The draft law concerning granting state status to certain religious holidays will introduce a legislative norm according to which an employer is advised to give a day off to an employee who is celebrating one of these holidays in accordance with his affiliation to one or another religious confession.

[Continue reading...](#)

Ukraine's MFA condemns OCU eviction from cathedral in Russia-occupied Crimea

Over 90 administrative cases against religious organizations in Crimea have been documented.

UNIAN (05.08.2020) - <https://bit.ly/30wQeM9> - The Ukrainian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) condemns the eviction of the community of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU) from the Cathedral of the Holy and Equal-to-the-Apostles Volodymyr and Olha in Simferopol.

"This decision by the occupying authorities reflects the policy of systemic oppression of the Ukrainian Orthodox community in temporarily occupied Crimea," the ministry said in a statement on August 5.

Only a week ago, the Russian occupying administration handed over to Archbishop Klyment an order on the demolition of the temple in Yevpatoria, the ministry said. In the course of the last year, the occupying administration detained Archbishop Klyment himself without justification in March, refused to register the local religious organization following his application in April, and terminated the lease of the premises of the acting cathedral in June. In July 2019, all the church utensils of the diocesan administration were stolen from this cathedral under the guise of building renovation.

"Oppression of the Ukrainian Orthodox community in Crimea aims at erasing the Ukrainian identity on the temporarily occupied territories and is a part of the policy of oppression of all religious communities in Crimea uncontrolled by Moscow," the ministry said.

The largest-scaled oppression is unfolded against the Crimean Muslims. According to human rights defenders, 71 Crimeans of Muslim confession are behind bars under the fabricated charges.

Contrary to international humanitarian law, the Russian Federation extended the application of its legislation to Ukrainian Crimea thus outlawing about 8,000 followers of the Jehovah's Witnesses. The occupying administration imprisoned two members of that community for their religious beliefs.

"The Russian occupying administration in Crimea abuses the anti-extremist legislation and uses the administrative legislation to the effect of oppressing the religious communities. Administrative pressure is being exercised not only against the Orthodox Church of Ukraine. This year, the fines for missionary activities were issued to the rabbi of the Jewish Messianic community and imam of the Alushta Muslim community," the ministry said.

Overall, since the beginning of the occupation, human rights defenders have documented 91 administrative cases against religious organizations and their members in Crimea, resulting in 73 administrative fines for a total amount exceeding 1 million Russian rubles (about US\$13,700).

Only Orthodox churches controlled by the Moscow Patriarch enjoy freedom from obstacles to their religious activities.

"We call on Russian Federation as an occupying power to abide by the norms of international law, including the international humanitarian law, and to stop the oppression of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine and other religious communities in Crimea," the ministry said.

Special bimonthly FORB digest (16-31.07.2020)

31.07.20 - Two separate criminal charges were filed against a Sakhalin-based believer based on the same subpart of the legal code

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2020/07/23.html>

Two criminal cases were brought against Vyacheslav Ivanov from the town of Nevelsk under the same part of the "extremist" article (part 2 of article 282.2). Two large law enforcement agencies use serious resources to prosecute a civilian for believing in God and talking about the Bible.

[Continue reading...](#)

31.07.20 - Jehovah's Witnesses repeatedly tried for same offenses

Link to full text in Russian: <https://www.zaprava.ru/na-saxaline-v-otnoshenii-svidetelya-iegovy-fsb-i-mvd-zaveli-ugolovnoe-delo-po-odnoj-i-toj-zhe-state/>

Two criminal cases on one and the same extremism article (part 2 of article 282.2 of the CC of RF—participation in an extremist association) were opened against a resident of the city of Nevelska (Sakhalin), Viacheslav Ivanov.

[Continue reading...](#)

29.07.20 - Largest raid on Jehovah's Witnesses leads to police brutality

Link to full text in Russian: <https://theins.ru/news/svidetel-iegovy-iz-voronezha-rasskazal-o-pytkah-i-izdevatelstvah-vo-vremya-doproso>

A Jehovah's Witness from Voronezh, Alexander Korol, described torture and abuse on the part of personnel of the MVD [Ministry of Internal Affairs] during interrogation. This is reported on the website Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia.

[Continue reading...](#)

29.07.20 - A raid on Solikamsk believers. After the interrogations, three men were placed in a detention facility

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2020/07/22.html>

On July 28, 2020, law enforcers searched three addresses in Solikamsk. Five citizens of Russia, including women, were taken to the Investigative Committee building. After the interrogations, two believers were detained, as well as the husband of a local woman who does not share his wife's religious views. The news is being supplemented.

[Continue reading...](#)

29.07.20 - "They placed a bag over my head, strangled and beat me." A Voronezh believer tells about being tortured after being detained

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2020/07/21.html>

Aleksandr Korol, 29, who was detained during a mass raid on Jehovah's Witnesses on July 13, was tortured during interrogation, demanding to identify his fellow believers: he was strangled with a plastic bag and beaten.

[Continue reading...](#)

28.07.20 - Jehovah's Witness fined instead of imprisoned

Link to full text in Russian: <https://www.ivanovonews.ru/news/1034040/>

In the city of Furmanov of Ivanovo oblast, a sentence was pronounced on an adherent of the religious organization of Jehovah's Witnesses, which is considered in Russia to be extremist. The believer was accused of organizing a forbidden religious association.

[Continue reading...](#)

28.07.20 - Yevgeniy Spirin from Furmanov is sentenced to a heavy fine for peaceful meetings with fellow believers.

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2020/07/20.html>

On July 28, 2020, the Furmanov City Court sentenced 34-year-old [Yevgeniy Spirin](#) a fine of 700,000 rubles, ruling that conversations with fellow-worshippers about God constitute extremism.

[Continue reading...](#)

28.07.20 - Jehovah's Witness in Russia convicted of extremism, concern over crackdown

A court in Russia has convicted and fined a Jehovah's Witnesses follower amid growing global concern over a campaign of persecution in the country against adherents of the religion.

[Continue reading...](#)

27.07.20 - About three billion rubles donated annually for construction of Orthodox churches in Moscow

Moscow, July 27, Interfax - Sponsors and parishioners donate about three billion rubles (\$43 million) every year for the construction of Orthodox churches in Moscow, the State Duma deputy, curator of new churches' building in the capital Vladimir Resin said.

[Continue reading...](#)

25.07.20 - Four days after his release from the special punishment cell, the prison administration sent Dennis Christensen back to the special punishment cell again

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2020/07/18.html>

After Christensen's release from the punishment cell (SHIZO), where he stayed for 15 days on unjustified charges, the administration of the colony brought him there again. The reason was the believer's refusal to work there, which is detrimental to his health.

Continue reading...

25.07.20 - Law enforcement forces from Surgut searched the home of Igor Petrov for the second time after his refusal to collect the items seized 1.5 years ago

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2020/07/19.html>

July 23, 2020 in Surgut was repeated search of the apartment of Igor Petrov, which since February 2019 is under investigation. A year and a half ago, in the course of a large-scale raid, law enforcement officers seized things from the believer.

Continue reading...

16.07.20 - Two believers beaten and ten sent to prison in the largest raid on Jehovah's Witnesses in the city of Voronezh

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2020/07/17.html>

More than 110 searches were carried out in the homes of Jehovah's Witnesses on July 13, 2020. The homes are located across seven residential communities in the City of Voronezh region. At least two believers reported severe beatings for refusing to provide smartphone passwords.

Continue reading...

09.07.20 - Prosecutor asks for longest term yet for Jehovah's Witness

On 9 July 2020, the prosecutor demanded sentencing 34-year-old Evgeny Spirin to seven years in a penal colony, concluding without rational basis that religious conversations are extremism. Evgeny does not acknowledge himself to be guilty. On 14 July he will possibly speak out with his final word. Then the Furmanov city court may issue a verdict.

Continue reading...

06.07.20 - Russian protestants seek removal of legal impediment to their activity

Link to full text in Russian:
http://www.sclj.ru/news/detail.php?SECTION_ID=524&ELEMENT_ID=8278

The Constitutional Court of the Russian Federation has accepted for consideration an appeal filed by lawyers of the Slavic Legal Center in the interests of the religious organization The Word of Life Church of Christians of Evangelical Faith (Pentecostals) of Dolgoprudnyi.

Continue reading...

02.07.20 - Activist of protestant Initsiativniki, who refuse to cooperate with state, punished

Link to full text in Russian: <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/4399449>

A magistrate judge in Troitsk (Cheliabinsk oblast) fined the leader of a local religious group of the "International Union of Churches of Evangelical Christians-Baptists" 5,000 rubles. He had not informed the regional department of the Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation about his preaching, the press service of the oblast prosecutor's office reports.

Continue reading...

Jehovah's Witness in Russia convicted of extremism, concern over crackdown

HRWF's director interviewed by Newsweek

By Brendan Cole

Newsweek (28.07.2020) - <https://www.newsweek.com/jehovahs-witnesses-russia-persecution-1521023> - A court in Russia has convicted and fined a Jehovah's Witnesses follower amid growing global concern over a campaign of persecution in the country against adherents of the religion.

Russia's Supreme Court ruled the religion as an extremist organization in April 2017 and since then, the group has complained that authorities have raided more than 1,000 properties of its followers. There are 372 believers under criminal investigation and 43 people are in prison—including 10 who have been convicted of extremism.

Yevgeniy Spirin, 34, had spent 160 days in pretrial detention and had been under house arrest from July 5, 2019, before his sentence was handed down on Tuesday on charges of organizing the activities of an extremist organization.

The Furmanovsky City Court in the Ivanovo Region convicted Spirin and fined him 500,000 Russian rubles (\$6,920). Spokesman for the Jehovah's Witnesses, Jarrod Lopes, said the conviction was "in complete disregard for the religious freedom enshrined in Russia's Constitution."

He said that raids had continued despite government assurances that followers were able to practice their religion at home. "The current state of religious freedom in Russia is reminiscent of Soviet times. It is well documented that Jehovah's Witnesses did not renounce their faith during Soviet oppression," Lopes said in a statement to *Newsweek*.

"Likewise, the persistent threat of arrest and imprisonment since the 2017 ban has not deterred our fellow believers in Russia today."

Authorities in Russia have long been suspicious of the proselytizing nature of the religion. **Executive director of Human Rights Without Frontiers International (HRWF), Willie Fautré** says it poses a challenge to the dominance of the Russian Orthodox Church.

"They are perceived as competitors by the extremist groups in the Russian Orthodox Church and also because they have their historical roots outside the country and culture and civilization," he told *Newsweek*.

"That's what those groups want to protect; the Slavic identity and Orthodox culture against the perceived invasion of Western values and religions coming from outside which are perceived as a threat to their Russian identity."

A report earlier this month by the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF)—a bipartisan U.S. federal government commission—said that the campaign against the religion had been spearheaded by the Russian activist Alexander Dvorkin, who has fought against movements he deemed as "cults."

In an interview with Russian state media after the religion's ban, **Dvorkin said** he wanted to protect the rights of followers because the faith "maintains strict control over every aspect of its members' lives," which the religion rejects.

He also denies that they are Christians because he says they don't believe in the divinity of Jesus Christ, according to NPR. While they do not believe in the Christian tenet of the Trinity, the Jehovah's Witnesses say they follow the teachings of Christ and consider him the leader of their church.

Fautré said: "The Russian Orthodox Church, or part of it, is backing the crusade of Alexander Dvorkin against any group identifying itself as Christian and that is perceived as a competitor in the market of religion.

"Dvorkin represents a radical nationalist right wing part of the Russian Orthodox Church and he is supported by such groups, but not all. Intellectuals in the Orthodox Church disagree and say it is counterproductive to do what he was doing.

"Some branches of the church would be more open to dialog to that sort of competition of religious movements with historical roots outside the country," **Fautré told *Newsweek***.

More than 100 raids took place on July 13 in the Voronezh Region in a crackdown that got international attention. The OSCE said that the "repression against members of a peaceful religious minority group is truly shocking." The raids were also criticized by the European Union and the British government.

One of those raided that day was Aleksandr Bokov, who told *Newsweek* about the fear he and his wife felt when Special Rapid Response Unit (SOBR) officers banged on his door at 6 a.m.

"They ordered my wife and me to lie down on the floor. At the same time, they hit me hard on the ribs and pushed me to the floor. The investigator began to read the search warrant to me. I had to listen to her lying on the floor," he said in a message sent via the encrypted social media messaging app Telegram.

Bokov said that two officers took him to the kitchen, leaving his wife in another room and he was again ordered to lie on the floor. Officers demanded that he reveal the passwords for his electronic devices.

No foreigners in Russian churches. Problems for the Catholic Church too

By Vladimir Rozanskij

Asia News (23.07.2020) - <https://bit.ly/32VY0B8> - A government bill prohibits foreigners from participating in and leading religious activities on Russian soil. Also excluded are religious personnel who have studied abroad and who show signs of "religious extremism". This will also create problems for Orthodox priests studying in Rome or abroad.

Moscow (AsiaNews) - Foreigners cannot participate in the activities of Russian religious associations, or even more so guide them: this is what is established by a bill presented by the Russian government last July 22 to the State Duma, the Russian parliament. The press office of the Lower Chamber of the Duma reported yesterday.

According to art. 7 of the federal law "On freedom of conscience and religious associations", only Russians and "other people who live permanently and legitimately on the territory of Russia" can enter a religious group. The law defines a "religious group" as a "union of people who profess the same faith, who do not require state registration". The leaders and participants of the group have the right to celebrate common liturgies, religious rites, aggregate and educate new members in their faith. However, prayer meetings must be held in specially authorized premises, and not in private homes.

In addition to foreigners, the ban on participating and leading communities is also extended to people classified as extremists and terrorists, according to official lists of the State Revisers Bureau. In addition, the ban also applies to believers in whose actions the court finds "signs of extremist activity". For some years now, Jehovah's Witnesses, various groups of Baptist Christians and other sects of various kinds have been included in this list.

In an explanatory note, the changes to the law "will make it impossible for priests or religious personnel who have received religious education abroad to spread extremist religious ideologies". This ban will create difficulties for Muslim preachers and Protestant pastors, but also for Catholic priests, among whom there are still many foreign missionaries, who are struggling to obtain permanent residence permits.

But problems could arise even for the same Russian priests sent to study in Rome or other theological faculties abroad, whose activities will be monitored in particular to check for any "signs of extremism". Recall that, as in the case of Jehovah's

Witnesses, even the interpretations of the Holy Scriptures "different from tradition" can be considered "extremist". Since there is no "official" version of the Bible in the Orthodox tradition, if not the ancient one in the Slavic-ecclesiastical language, the question of interpretation lends itself to ambiguous and diversified treatment.

On Violations of Freedom of Religion or Belief in the Russian Federation: US Statement at the OSCE

As delivered by Acting Political Counselor Lane Darnell Bahlto the Permanent Council, Vienna

July 23, 2020 - <https://bit.ly/30FqJJd>

The United States is deeply concerned by the July 13 announcement that the Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation for the Voronezh Region conducted 110 raids, as mentioned before, in a single day against Jehovah's Witnesses, resulting in criminal cases against at least 10 persons and at least two reported beatings by police. The scale of this repression against members of a peaceful religious minority group is truly shocking, as was local authorities' press release bragging about it.

Unwarranted abuse against the peaceful community of Jehovah's Witnesses has escalated since 2017, when the Russian Supreme Court labeled the faith a supposed "extremist" organization for its members' peaceful exercise of their religious freedom. The United States and many others in this hall have spoken out and will continue to speak out concerning reports of unjust police raids, arbitrary arrests and detentions, convictions resulting in up to six-year sentences, and torture of Jehovah's Witnesses by Russian authorities.

In its public statement, the Voronezh Investigative Committee claims that some of the individuals detained used such "conspiracy measures" to conceal their activities as "storing reports and other documentation in electronic form, organizing groups and using video conferencing to conduct collective meetings." I use such "conspiracy measures" on a daily basis and I would point out that anyone that members of the Russian delegation participating in this meeting remotely are—at this very moment—guilty of engaging in such activities. These justifications are both absurd and shameful.

Furthermore, Russia continues to try to use international law enforcement systems, to pursue Jehovah's Witnesses and members of other religious minority groups located abroad, as part of a larger pattern of Russian actions aimed at transnational repression. The United States calls upon participating States to reject Russia's targeting of Jehovah's Witnesses for reprisal for practicing their faith.

We also note with concern that authorities have stripped citizenship from multiple imprisoned Jehovah's Witnesses and other religious prisoners of conscience. We note the case of former religious prisoner of conscience Yevgeniy Kim, who was stripped of his citizenship, rendered stateless, and is still languishing in a migration detention center over 15 months after his release from prison. His citizenship should be restored, and he should be released.

The United States renews our call on Russia to immediately release all those imprisoned or detained for exercising their human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the 10 Jehovah's Witnesses already reportedly convicted and serving prison terms, as well as

the nearly 50 others reportedly held in pretrial detention or house arrest for exercising their freedom of religion or belief. We urge Russia to cease criminal investigations against Jehovah's Witnesses for practicing their faith, including the reported 353 investigations currently ongoing. We further call on Russia to halt the seizure of the Jehovah's Witnesses' headquarters property and abide by its international obligations and OSCE commitments to respect freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief for all.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Situation of Jehovah's Witnesses in the Russian Federation: UK Statement at the OSCE

Delivered by Nicola Murray, Deputy Head of Delegation, at the OSCE Permanent Council on 23 July 2020.



UK Delegation to the OSCE (23.07.2020) - <https://bit.ly/3fWL4P5> - The United Kingdom remains deeply concerned about the situation of Jehovah's Witnesses in the Russian Federation. As we said on 12 March, the ruling of the Russian Supreme Court in July 2017, which rejected the appeal against the decision to categorise Jehovah's Witnesses as "extremists", criminalised the peaceful worship of 175,000 Russian citizens and contravened the right to religious freedom that is enshrined in the Russian Constitution, and in multiple OSCE commitments.

It is with deep regret that we learned that on 13 July, 110 homes of Jehovah's Witnesses were simultaneously searched by Russian authorities in the cities of Voronezh and Stary Oskol. Thirteen Jehovah's Witnesses were detained at the time and two individuals were reportedly beaten during a home search.

The total number of homes of Jehovah's Witnesses that have been searched by Russian law enforcement authorities now stands at over 1,000. As we noted in March, home raids are often conducted in the early hours of the morning by large numbers of masked and armed police.

We repeat our concern that the increasing number of searches, as well as use of simultaneous large-scale home raids, creates the impression of an organised campaign of persecution against Jehovah's Witnesses.

So-called "evidence" used against those investigated and prosecuted includes regular aspects of communal religious life. We again remind the Russian Federation of our extensive commitments on freedom of religion or belief, including from Vienna 1989, as well as Kyiv 2013, where States committed to:

Fully implement their commitments to ensure the right of all individuals to profess and practice religion or belief, either alone or in community with others, and in public or private, and to manifest their religion or belief through teaching, practice, worship and observance, including through transparent and non-discriminatory laws, regulations, practices and policies;

For three years now, the delegation of the Russian Federation has assured the Permanent Council that individual Jehovah's Witnesses are able to practice their religion at home, as no permission is required to pray in Russia. However, we have witnessed time and again that any manifestation of their faith by Jehovah's Witnesses can result in the search of their homes, lengthy detention, criminal prosecution and imprisonment.

We again call on the Russian Federation to end the persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses, and to uphold the commitments on the right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief for all individuals across the Russian Federation.

USCIRF exposes European "Experts" who support CCP campaigns against "Cults"

The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom publishes a document against Russian anti-cultist Alexander Dvorkin and his organization FECRIS, both supporters of religious persecution in China.

by Massimo Introvigne



Alexander Dvorkin (*credits*)

Bitter Winter (18.07.2020) - <https://bit.ly/3jh9V21> - On July 17, 2020, the USCIRF, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, unveiled a new document, whose title is "**The Anti-cult Movement and Religious Regulation in Russia and the Former Soviet Union.**" The USCIRF is an independent, bipartisan U.S. federal government commission created by the 1998 International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA). Its Commissioners are appointed by the President and by Congressional leaders of both political parties.

The title may indicate that the document does not concern China, and in fact its main focus is Russia. However, there are three important connections between the new USCIRF report and China.

First, the report offers a detailed and accurate analysis of the activities of Alexander Dvorkin, a Russian activist who has led for almost thirty years campaigns against religious movements he has labeled as "cults." As the report documents, he has been instrumental in preparing the repression of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia, and has attacked many other religious minorities. The USCIRF asks the government of the United States to "publicly censure Alexander Dvorkin and [his organization], the Saint Irenaeus of Lyon Information-Consultation Center (SILIC), for their ongoing disinformation campaign against religious minorities."

The report mentions Dvorkin's activities outside of Russia. Although this part of his "disinformation campaigns" is not mentioned by the USCIRF, Dvorkin has regularly supported the CCP in its repression of movements labeled as *xie jiao*. Dvorkin went repeatedly to China and Hong Kong to offer his support **to the persecution of Falun Gong**, to **deny that the CCP is harvesting organs** from prisoners of conscience, and to **applaud the repression** of The Church of Almighty God. In turn, the CCP has supported Dvorkin's **campaigns against the Jehovah's Witnesses** in Russia, and "imported" them to China. While the CCP has introduced Dvorkin as an authoritative "Russian expert in sect

studies,” the USCIRF report exposes him as a pseudo-expert “relying on discredited theories” and promoting religious intolerance and discrimination.

Second, Dvorkin, as the USCIRF report notes, has been active internationally as vice-president of a transnational anti-cult organization known as FECRIS, the European Federation of Research and Information Centers on Sectarianism. FECRIS is also notorious for the support several of its members, in addition to Dvorkin, have offered to the CCP’s persecution of Falun Gong in China. In turn, the CCP’s Anti-xie-jiao association has advertised and republished reports by the FECRIS against the Jehovah’s Witnesses and other groups. The more one investigates, the more one discovers a two-way relationship between FECRIS (and Dvorkin) and Chinese organizations who promote and justify the bloody persecution of Falun Gong, The Church of Almighty God, and other religious movements.

Third, the USCIRF document is an important indictment of the anti-cult ideology in general. Dvorkin, the report says, absorbed when he was in the United States, between 1977 and 1992, the ideas of an “anti-cult movement informed by pseudoscientific concepts like ‘brainwashing’ and ‘mind control.’” The anti-cult movement “described new religious movements as ‘fanatic’ or ‘bizarre,’ and portrayed individual members as helpless victims without their own free will or ability to save themselves. This rhetoric enabled groups to justify the forced removal of friends and relatives from the religions of their choice, and even advocated for ‘deprogramming.’” As the USCIRF notes, while “claiming to be experts in academic fields like religious studies, psychology, and sociology, [Dvorkin and the anti-cultists] are rarely qualified in any of them and often rely on discredited theories and methodologies to promote their ideological agenda.”

This is, again, important for China as well. While the persecution of movements labeled as *xie jiao* started in the late Ming era, the CCP has tried to justify and promote it abroad by translating *xie jiao* as “cults,” or “evil cults,” and claiming that the repression of the *xie jiao* in China is part of an international effort against “cults,” which are perceived as a problem in other countries as well. In fact, *xie jiao* means “heterodox teachings,” and “heterodox” in Chinese history has been interpreted both as ideologically deviant and not approved by the government in power.

Translating *xie jiao* as “cults” is not a mistake. The CCP hopes to be able to jump on the bandwagon of international anti-cultism, and convert those Western media that are sympathetic to the anti-cultists into supporters of its repressive campaigns against the groups it lists as *xie jiao*, particularly The Church of Almighty God and Falun Gong. Occasionally, this campaign was successful, although the fake news produced by the CCP against these movements are now increasingly exposed as lies by quality Western media.

But it remains true that the ideology of anti-cultism is similar to the repressive anti-xie-jiao ideology of the Chinese Communist Party. Wherever the former is promoted, the CCP easily finds friends. It is, thus, very important that, for the first time, an official U.S.federal government commission exposes anti-cultism as an “ideology” based on discredited pseudo-science and aimed at “the suppression of religious liberty.”

Orthodox fundamentalism threatens Russian Patriarchate and Kremlin

Eurasia Daily Monitor (14.07.2020) - Radical Russian Orthodox fundamentalist Shiigumen Sergey, who controls a monastery in the Urals and has attracted a wide following across Russia, has demanded that Patriarch Kirill and President Vladimir Putin both leave their posts and hand their powers over to him ([Ahilla.ru](#), July 13). That bold ultimatum, in its sheer outrageousness, spotlights an issue that has attracted remarkably little attention until now: Christian Orthodox fundamentalism and the threat it poses to the Moscow Patriarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) as well as to the Kremlin. The danger comes not from the possibility that either Russian leader is about to accede to this wild insistence but because it shows that there are a growing number of Russian Orthodox hierarchs and laity who reject the slavish obedience of the Patriarchate to the state. And despite their often-reactionary views, these people are exploiting the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic to spread such ideology far more effectively than their opponents. As a result, it is becoming ever more difficult for the Kremlin to continue to rely on the ROC as a major ideological weapon both at home and abroad.

As in past cases, both the Patriarchate and the Kremlin have adopted a whack-a-mole approach, disciplining the priest involved first via church law and then by applying civil law, rather than addressing the larger problems the Urals region abbot represents. The key precedent for Moscow's response to Shiigumen Sergey was its earlier response to another Orthodox fundamentalist, Bishop Diomid of Anadyr and Chukotka, a decade ago ([Nr2.ru](#), [Windowoneurasia.blogspot.com](#), June 30, 2008). Such a strategy may remove from the scene the individuals involved, but they do little to solve problems and may, in fact, make them worse for both the Church and the state.

Many analysts in Russia and the West are accustomed to speaking about fundamentalism in Islam, but fundamentalism exists in every religion, arising as it does out of a sense among some of its followers that they must turn away from leaders who have violated the basic provisions of the faith and go back to first principles. Now, in Russia at least, analysts are beginning to focus not just on how Orthodox fundamentalism is challenging the Church hierarchy but also how they are affecting relations between the ROC and the Russian state and demanding a voice in the formulation of state policy.

The fundamentalists' challenge to the ROC is more immediate. But their challenge, both direct and indirect, to the Kremlin is likely to be more fateful.

The coronavirus pandemic has brought both challenges to the fore. Patriarch Kirill, afraid of the growing power of the fundamentalists, deferred to his bishops, many of whom have fundamentalist views themselves, on the question of whether churches would be closed or not. In Moscow, he closed them, but elsewhere each local bishop made his own decision. Both Kirill's obvious fear of this decentralizing trend within the Church and the new ability of the bishops to act more independently are making the fundamentalists the most important threat to the patriarch and a unified Russian Orthodox Church. Some are now even talking about splits, regional autocephaly or a Russian reformation, Sergey Chaplin, a close observer of the Orthodox Church, says ([Carnegie.ru](#), June 29).

Yet, the fundamentalists have not limited their challenges to the religious sphere. They are now presenting demands to the Kremlin as well, putting forward ideas very much at odds with those of Kirill. One of the most prominent lay Orthodox fundamentalists is Konstantin Malofeyev, a prominent businessman who owns the nationalist Tsargradtelevision network (see [Hot Issue](#), August 8, 2014). He has assembled around himself people like Nikita Mikhalkov and Sergey Glazyev, and they

regularly push their views on political issues via Deputy Prime Minister Andrey Belousov, apparently an ally within the regime ([Ura.news](#), July 8).

Encouraged by that, the group has taken the next step and presented to the Kremlin a 500-page program on how to change Russia's course and promote development by means of blocking the export of capital, lowering interest rates, and promoting genuine protectionism so as to allow for the re-industrialization of the country, thereby reversing the direction set by more liberal figures like German Gref, Anatoly Chubais and Aleksei Kudrin. In many ways, Malofeyev is preaching to the choir. In particular, the "Orthodox oligarch" has suggested that, although Putin will likely remain after 2024, "anything can happen"; and if the Kremlin leader does go, the liberals will stage a comeback because there are so many of them in office—and only one in prison, where, he contends, they all belong. At the same time, however, Malofeyev highlights a problem that Putin has, so far, been unwilling to address ([Ura.news](#), July 8).

The system of church administration Patriarch Kirill created is collapsing, in part because of the coronavirus but more importantly because of the increasing power of Orthodox fundamentalists across the country. "Orthodox fundamentalism [...] has again appeared in the last five years," Chaplin observed in May ([Rosbalt](#), May 1). It now exists "throughout Russia," and the health crisis is giving its adherents the chance to spread their views more publicly as they are actively using social networks and working with multimedia content far more often and effectively than do representatives of the established Church. Consequently, Putin cannot count on the Patriarchate to serve the Kremlin, either as an ideological arm within the Russian Federation or as an aid to his expansive ideas about the "Russian World" abroad ([Politeia.ru](#), February 2020; [Postimees.ee](#), July 8).

The Kremlin leader now faces a difficult choice between continuing to rely on an increasingly ineffective Patriarchate, trying to revive it with someone like his favorite Metropolitan Tikhon of Pskov ([Gorod 812](#), May 8), or rebuilding the ROC around the fundamentalists whose very enthusiasm would constitute both an opportunity and a threat. But either of these options could lead to schism—the very thing Putin most wants to avoid.

15 months in deportation centre so far

18 months after officials secretly stripped Yevgeny Kim of Russian citizenship (his only citizenship) and 15 months after he completed his jail term for exercising freedom of religion or belief, the now-stateless 45-year-old Muslim remains in the foreigners' detention centre in Khabarovsk. Uzbekistan – where he was born – refuses to accept him. In June, he asked for identity documents enabling him to leave Russia voluntarily for Turkey.

By Victoria Arnold

Forum 18 (13.07.2020) - <https://bit.ly/33xe4JN> - More than a year after the stripping ("annulment") of his Russian citizenship and his release from prison, 45-year-old Muslim Yevgeny Kim remains in the detention centre for foreign nationals and stateless persons in the far eastern city of Khabarovsk. Uzbekistan – where he was born, but whose citizenship he has never held – is refusing to accept him, two court appeals have failed, and he has as yet no documentation which would allow him to leave Russia legally for a third country.

In June, Kim asked for identity documents enabling him to leave Russia voluntarily for Turkey (see below).

Kim was transferred to the detention centre in April 2019 after completing a jail term on "extremism"-related charges handed down to punish him for exercising freedom of religion or belief by meeting with fellow Muslims to read and discuss the works of the late Turkish theologian Said Nursi (see below).

Interior Ministry officials secretly stripped Kim of Russian citizenship (his only citizenship) in January 2019. Prison staff only informed him of this the day before his release in April 2019 (see below).

On the day of his release, a Khabarovsk court found Kim guilty of violating the residence requirements of the Russian Federation by not having the correct documents, and ordered his deportation. Kim did not have any documents because officials had confiscated his Russian passport the previous day (see below).

On 10 June 2020, a Vladivostok court rejected Kim's latest appeal against the April 2019 deportation order (see below).

A May 2017 Constitutional Court decision directed legislators to "amend the Administrative Code so that it ensures reasonable judicial control over the timeframes of the detention of stateless persons subject to forced expulsion in specialised institutions". They have not done so (see below).

Stateless persons continue to be detained. Sometimes they are released if bailiffs apply to court indicating the impossibility of carrying out deportation. In other cases, judges have ordered their release with reference to the Constitutional Court ruling (see below).

"This law on the annulment of citizenship is vicious," Alexander Verkhovsky, Director of the SOVA Centre for Information and Analysis, commented to Forum 18.

"It is unacceptable that Yevgeny Kim has not been issued with documents as a stateless person," Verkhovsky added. "With these documents, he could go, say, to Turkey. But it seems that the authorities either are not satisfied with an outcome so favourable to him, or they fear that once he has these documents he will not leave" (see below).

Forum 18 asked the Human Rights Ombudsperson for Khabarovsk Region Igor Chesnitsky:

- what conditions are like in the Khabarovsk detention centre;
- what measures have been taken to protect detainees from coronavirus;
- and how Kim might be able to obtain documents allowing him either to live in Russia or leave the country legally.

Forum 18 has received no reply (see below).

In April 2020, the authorities stripped two jailed Jehovah's Witnesses of citizenship. The two men are likely to be ordered deported (to Uzbekistan and Ukraine respectively) upon their release, despite their long residence in and close ties to Russia, including being married to Russian citizens.

Still in detention 15 months on

Yevgeny Lvovich Kim (born 5 October 1974) remains in the detention centre for foreign nationals and stateless persons in Khabarovsk, more than a year after his release from prison. Uzbekistan – where he was born, but whose citizenship he has never held – is

refusing to accept him, two court appeals have failed, and he has as yet no documentation which would allow him to leave Russia legally for a third country.

Kim was released from Labour Camp No. 3 in Khabarovsk on 10 April 2019, after serving one year and seven and half months under 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") and Article 282, Part 1 ("Actions directed at the incitement of hatred [nenavist] or enmity [vrazhda], as well as the humiliation of an individual or group of persons on the basis of sex, race, nationality, language, origin, attitude to religion, or social group").

Kim was punished for meeting with fellow Muslims to read and discuss the works of Said Nursi.

Prosecutors characterised this as "continuing the activities" of "Nurdzhular" (an organisation which Muslims in Russia deny exists, but which was outlawed as extremist in April 2008), and the exertion of "active influence on the sub-consciousness, consciousness, will, and behaviour of people attending the gatherings, with the aim of formulating in them a feeling of hatred and enmity, and also of humiliating the dignity of a person or group of people on grounds of religion and social grouping".

After his arrest in December 2015, Kim was tortured in pre-trial detention. Against Russia's legally binding international obligations, no arrests or prosecutions of those who tortured Kim, or those who facilitated the torture, are yet known to have happened.

Blagoveshchensk City Court in Amur Region sentenced Kim to three years and nine months' imprisonment on 19 June 2017. He completed his prison term in April 2019 because of the time he had spent in detention during the investigation and trial, and while his appeal was pending.

Under amendments to Criminal Code Article 72, signed into law in July 2018 but applied retroactively, one day in detention is taken as equivalent to a day and half in a general-regime labour camp.

Kim was (unbeknown to him) stripped of his Russian citizenship in January 2019 as a direct result of his conviction, rendering him stateless. Camp officials seized his Russian passport on 9 April, the day before his release.

When he was released the following day, Kim was immediately charged under Administrative Code Article 18.8, Part 1.1 ("Violation by a foreign citizen or stateless person of the residence regime of the Russian Federation, taking the form of the absence of documents confirming the right to residence in the Russian Federation").

On 10 April 2019, Khabarovsk's Railway District Court fined Kim 3,000 Roubles and ordered his expulsion from the country, stipulating that he should in the meantime be kept in detention.

Kim remains on the Federal Financial Monitoring Service (Rosfinmonitoring) "List of Terrorists and Extremists", whose assets banks are obliged to freeze (although small transactions are permitted).

European Court of Human Rights ruling on detention of stateless persons

The Anti-Discrimination Centre Memorial and the Russian Migration and Law Network raised the situation of stateless persons detained in Russia before the European Court of

Human Rights (ECtHR) in Strasbourg in the case of Roman Kim (no connection to Yevgeny Kim). Roman Kim was a stateless person held in a detention centre in St Petersburg for two years because he could not be deported to his birthplace of Uzbekistan.

The ECtHR ruled in July 2014 (Kim v. Russia, Application no. 44260/13) that Russia had violated:

- Article 3 ("No one shall be subjected to inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment") by the maintenance of inhuman conditions of detention;
- Article 5, Part 1 ("Everyone has the right to liberty and security of person") by extended detention without the prospect of expulsion;
- and Article 5, Part 4 ("Everyone who is deprived of his liberty by arrest or detention shall be entitled to take proceedings by which the lawfulness of his detention shall be decided speedily by a court and his release ordered if the detention is not lawful") by denying detainees the right to appeal.

The ECtHR stipulated that Russia should adopt measures to ensure court oversight of the detention of stateless persons.

Constitutional Court ruling on stateless detainees' right to appeal

On 23 May 2017, as the result of an appeal by Noe Mskhiladze (a stateless person repeatedly detained for not having the necessary documents, but again, unable to be deported), Russia's Constitutional Court ruled that Administrative Code Article 31.7 ("Termination of fulfilment of an administrative sentence") and Article 31.9 ("Time limit on fulfilment of an administrative sentence") were unconstitutional.

The Court decided that these Administrative Code Articles were unconstitutional insofar as they do not permit stateless persons, who had been ordered deported and sent to migration detention centres, to appeal in court against their continued detention if they cannot be expelled from the country.

Administrative Code Article 31.7 lists the grounds for halting the execution of an administrative punishment and Article 31.9 stipulates a two-year time limit. Neither article, however, considers the impossibility of a sentence being carried out (e.g. the impossibility of deporting a stateless person) – or, in the case of a stateless person, how to prevent them from being caught in a cycle of repeated prosecutions, detentions, and unfulfilled expulsion orders.

The Constitutional Court cited the ECtHR's 2014 judgment and directed Russian lawmakers to "amend the Administrative Code so that it ensures reasonable judicial control over the timeframes of the detention of stateless persons subject to forced expulsion in specialised institutions".

The Court also ruled that, until such amendments come into force, detained stateless persons "must be granted the right to apply to a court to check the legality of their further deprivation (restriction) of freedom upon the expiry of three months from the day the court decision on expulsion was adopted".

Legislators drew up relevant amendments in the wake of the Constitutional Court's decision, but these have not yet passed through Parliament. Stateless persons continue to be detained. Sometimes they are released if bailiffs apply to court indicating the impossibility of carrying out deportation. In other cases, judges have ordered their release with reference to the Constitutional Court ruling.

Grounds for deprivation of citizenship

Article 6 of the Russian Constitution states that individuals cannot be stripped of their citizenship. Kim (and, more recently, two jailed Jehovah's Witnesses), however, was deprived of his Russian citizenship on the basis of an amendment to Article 22 of the 2002 Citizenship Law which entered legal force on 1 September 2017.

Citizenship Law Article 22 states that citizenship can be annulled if it was awarded on the basis of forged documents or "false information". The 2017 amendment added that conviction under particular articles of the Criminal Code, including Article 282.2 ("Organising" or "Participating in the activities of a banned extremist organisation", with which Jehovah's Witnesses and Muslim readers of Nursi's works are most commonly charged) and Article 282.3 ("Financing extremist activity", with which many Jehovah's Witnesses have also been charged), is taken as equivalent to knowingly presenting false information in a citizenship application.

As a result, therefore, authorities may annul the citizenship of a person who has been found guilty of one of these offences, and who acquired Russian citizenship by naturalisation rather than by birth.

"This law on the annulment of citizenship is vicious," Alexander Verkhovsky, Director of the SOVA Centre for Information and Analysis, commented to Forum 18 from Moscow on 8 July. "It assumes that the person, when applying for citizenship, was already going to undermine the constitutional order, and in this sense gave false information about themselves, and therefore the decision to grant citizenship is invalid."

Verkhovsky pointed out that a person then could change their views over time. "They might not even have imagined that their views imply a change to the constitutional order," he added.

Indefinite detention?

Because Kim is stateless, there is technically no country to which he can be deported, and so his punishment as decided by Khabarovsk's Railway District Court in April 2019 cannot be fulfilled.

Administrative Code Article 31.9 places a time limit of two years on the execution of administrative punishments (not specific to offences under migration law). Once this time is up, in April 2021, Kim's deportation order will lapse and he will have to be released from the detention centre.

Without citizenship of any country or any documents permitting him either to stay in Russia or legally depart, however, Kim would therefore again be liable to administrative prosecution, further detention, and another unfulfillable deportation order.

Attempting to cross the border in either direction without documents is a criminal offence under Criminal Code Article 322, Part 1. This carries a fine of up to 200,000 Roubles, an assigned labour sentence of up to two years, or up to two years' imprisonment.

On 11 June 2020, according to a fellow Muslim who is following the case, Kim wrote to the Department for Migration Issues at the Khabarovsk Region branch of the Interior Ministry, requesting that he be formally recognised as a stateless person (*litso bez grazhdanstva*). He also asked to be given identity documents enabling him to leave Russia voluntarily for Turkey. Forum 18 has been unable to find out whether he has received any response.

"It is unacceptable that Yevgeny Kim has not been issued with documents as a stateless person," Verkhovsky of the SOVA Centre for Information and Analysis commented to Forum 18. "With these documents, he could go, say, to Turkey. But it seems that the authorities either are not satisfied with an outcome so favourable to him, or they fear that once he has these documents he will not leave."

Kim's detention centre address is:

680003, Khabarovskiy kray
g. Khabarovsk
ul. Repina 3
Tsentr vremennogo sodержaniya inostrannikh grazhdan

Detention centre conditions

The Anti-Discrimination Centre Memorial notes in its 2017 report, "Imprisoned stateless persons in Russia: the search for a way out of a legal dead end", that detention centres for foreign nationals and stateless persons are frequently overcrowded and unsanitary. Many have beds for four people close together in one room, and toilet and shower facilities either separated from living space by only a curtain, or shared between many cells on the same floor. These conditions are of particular concern during the present coronavirus pandemic.

Amenities vary between detention centres, but are often worse than in labour camps where most people given jail sentences in Russia serve their terms, in that a detention centre has no library, gym, or on-site medical facilities, no system for inmates to earn or spend their own money, and nothing for them to do except watch television. Outdoor exercise periods tend to be limited to one hour per day in summer and 30 minutes in winter.

Forum 18 wrote to the Human Rights Ombudsperson for Khabarovsk Region Igor Chesnitsky before the start of the Khabarovsk working day of 9 July, asking:

- what conditions are like in the Khabarovsk detention centre;
- what measures have been taken to protect detainees from coronavirus;
- and how Kim might be able to obtain documents allowing him either to live in Russia or leave the country legally.

Forum 18 received no reply by the end of the Khabarovsk working day of 13 July.

On 19 March 2020, Ombudsperson Chesnitsky's website reported that he had conducted an inspection of the detention centre, during which he "pointed out shortcomings in the organisation of walks, information support, and medical care for detainees". After the inspection, the findings would be sent to the regional Interior Ministry branch, and the district prosecutor's office would also take (unspecified) measures, the report noted.

The Ombudsperson's visit was triggered by an inspection by Khabarovsk Region Public Chamber on 16 March, which also recorded detainees' complaints of shortages of particular medicines and a lack of daily walks.

A brief report of the Public Chamber's inspection, posted on its website on 17 March, noted that 29 people were in the detention centre, two to four to a room, and that plumbing and ventilation systems were in working order. Photographs show shared shower facilities and notices of the mask-wearing and hand-washing regime instituted on 10 February in light of the coronavirus pandemic.

Unsuccessful appeals

On 31 March 2020, according to the court website, Kim lodged an administrative suit at Khabarovsk's Railway District Court, challenging the legality of his continued detention, as he is permitted to do under the Constitutional Court's 2017 ruling.

Kim's suit disputed "the inaction of the Department of Migration Issues of Khabarovsk Region Interior Ministry and the Interdistrict Department of Bailiffs for the Fulfilment of Special Enforcement Proceedings, insofar as they are taking no measures to fulfil the ruling of the judge of Railway District Court of 10 April 2019", according to court documents seen by Forum 18.

The court rejected this suit without consideration on 13 April 2020 because it had been submitted under the wrong legal code. Kim's appeal against this rejection was itself refused on 2 June 2020 because it had not been submitted within the 15-day appeal period.

Kim has also appealed directly against the conviction under Administrative Code Article 18.8, Part 1.1 which resulted in his deportation order. According to the court website, he lodged a cassational appeal at the 9th Cassational Court in Vladivostok on 15 April 2020. This was unsuccessful on 10 June 2020.

According to the written verdict, seen by Forum 18, Kim argued that he had not had the opportunity to obtain the necessary documentation to reside in Russia, as he had been serving a jail sentence. The judge dismissed this point, concluding that Kim had had from 29 January 2019 (the date that he was stripped of his citizenship) until 9 April 2019 (the date his passport was confiscated) to challenge the decision or obtain residence papers, and that incarceration does not prevent a person from submitting written applications.

According to fellow Muslims who have been following the case, however, Kim did not learn that he had been stripped of citizenship until 9 April 2019, the day before his release, when the prison authorities informed him of the fact.

As the organisations responsible for ensuring court rulings are carried out, bailiffs' departments sometimes apply to courts in an attempt to resolve the legal limbo in which stateless persons find themselves, ADC Memorial noted in its 2017 report.

In Kim's case, Bailiff Svetlana Fedyanina of Khabarovsk Region Interdistrict Department of Bailiffs for the Fulfilment of Special Enforcement Proceedings wrote to Railway District Court on 6 May 2020 to request that the court halt the fulfilment of its ruling of 10 April 2019 (Kim's administrative conviction) with regard to the deportation order.

Bailiff Fedyanina withdrew this request once she learned that Kim had appealed to the 9th Cassational Court. It remains unclear what the bailiffs' department will do now that this appeal has proved unsuccessful. Forum 18 wrote to the department before the start of the Khabarovsk working day on 8 July, asking if it had received any response from the court and what was likely to happen to Kim. Forum 18 had received no reply by the end of the Khabarovsk working day of 13 July.

The letter of 6 May 2020, seen by Forum 18, confirms that Kim was stripped of his citizenship on 29 January 2019 by the Department for Migration Issues at Sverdlovsk Region branch of the Interior Ministry (the body which originally granted it), and that "to deport Kim to the Republic of Uzbekistan is impossible, as he is not a citizen [of that country]". It gives as the basis for the request the Constitutional Court ruling of 23 May 2017.

Kim lodged an appeal against his original criminal prosecution at the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) in Strasbourg in February 2018 (Application no. 8301/18). The ECtHR has not yet decided whether the case is admissible.

"Russia has deceived Interpol"

Russia is using Interpol Red Notices to try to get back at least three citizens now based abroad to prosecute them on extremism charges for exercising freedom of religion or belief. Two are Muslims who meet to study their faith using the writings of Said Nursi. The Red Notices appear to violate Interpol's rules, which ban their use in ways that violate individuals' human rights.

By Felix Corley

Forum 18 (10.07.2020) - <https://bit.ly/2EOXCKu> - Russia has issued Red Notices through Interpol seeking the detention and extradition back to Russia of at least three citizens now based abroad to face criminal charges under the Extremism Law to punish them for exercising freedom of religion or belief. One was issued in 2018 and two in 2020. The Red Notices appear to violate Interpol's rules, which ban their use to secure the extradition of individuals for political reasons, and in ways that violate their human rights.

Russia issued the first two of the Red Notices against Muslims: Timur Atadzhanov in 2018 and Ashurali Magomedeminov in 2020. Both studied their faith using the works of the late Turkish Muslim theologian Said Nursi. The third Red Notice was issued later in 2020 against a member of another faith (see below).

All three have had their bank accounts in Russia blocked and are on the Russian Interior Ministry wanted list (see below).

Atadzhanov spent eleven months in a deportation detention centre in the country where he took refuge, before being released in May 2019. However, he failed to overturn the deportation order through the local courts and remains at risk of return to Russia (see below).

None of the three men appears on the Interpol Red Notice online public database. Only about a tenth of those facing Red Notices are listed publicly on the Interpol website (see below).

"Russia has deceived Interpol," a Muslim who reads Nursi's works and knows the two men complained to Forum 18. He pointed to the impact of such Red Notices. "You are immediately detained without any investigation and taken to a detention centre for terrorists, where you are treated as a terrorist. Russia gives no information except that you are an international terrorist" (see below).

Human rights defenders have repeatedly criticised governments' misuse of Interpol Red Notices to target individuals – including human rights defenders and journalists - on political grounds (see below).

In 2017, Kazakhstan used an Interpol Red Notice to try to get back a Muslim who had left Kazakhstan years earlier. A German court rejected Kazakhstan's extradition request in February 2019 (see below).

Atadzhanov and Magomedeminov are considering challenging the Red Notice through the Commission for the Control of Interpol's Files, which handles complaints about Red Notices considered to be abusive (see below).

A Red Notice "is a request to law enforcement worldwide to locate and provisionally arrest a person pending extradition, surrender, or similar legal action", Interpol explains on its website.

"Russia has deceived Interpol"

Interpol – which Russia joined in September 1990 - circulated the three Red Notices despite Article 2 of its Constitution declaring that Interpol's promotion of mutual assistance must be "in the spirit of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights", while Article 3 declares: "It is strictly forbidden for the Organization [Interpol] to undertake any intervention or activities of a political, military, religious or racial character."

Human rights defenders have repeatedly criticised governments' misuse of Interpol Red Notices to target individuals – including human rights defenders and journalists - on political grounds.

"Russia has deceived Interpol," a Muslim who reads Nursi's works and knows the two men complained to Forum 18. "The impact is very bad. You are immediately detained without any investigation and taken to a detention centre for terrorists, where you are treated as a terrorist. Russia gives no information except that you are an international terrorist. Approaches must be made to Interpol."

Forum 18 asked Interpol about whether these Russian Red Notices seeking to punish individuals for exercising freedom of religion or belief met its requirements.

"If or when police in any of Interpol's 194 member countries share information with the General Secretariat in Lyon," Interpol press office responded from its headquarters in the French city of Lyon on 6 July, "this information remains under the ownership of that member country. Interpol does not comment on specific cases except in special circumstances and with the approval of the member country concerned."

Kazakhstan also issued a Red Notice via Interpol against Atyrau-born Sunni Muslim Murat Bakrayev in 2017. The Kazakh authorities sought to prosecute him for exercising freedom of religion or belief by giving talks on Islam while living in exile in the Czech Republic, long after he had left Kazakhstan. A German court rejected Kazakhstan's extradition request in February 2019.

Were Russia's Red Notices permissible?

Forum 18 asked the National Central Bureau of Interpol at Russia's Interior Ministry on 6 July about the three Red Notices seeing the return of the individuals to face criminal prosecution to punish their exercise of freedom of religion or belief. However, the official – who did not give her name – referred all questions to the Interior Ministry press office. It in turn asked for questions in writing.

Forum 18 asked the Interior Ministry press office in writing the same day why Russia is using Interpol to try to have Atadzhanov, Magomedeminov and at least one other individual extradited back to Russia when Interpol's procedures ban use of the organisation to try to gain the extradition of individuals for political reasons, and in ways that violate their human rights. Forum 18 received no response by the middle of the working day in Moscow on 10 July.

First known Russian Red Notice seeking to punish freedom of religion or belief

Timur Muzafarovich Atadzhanov (born 21 April 1988) is a Muslim who meets with others to study his faith using the works of the late Turkish Muslim theologian Said Nursi. He was among nine Muslims detained in a cafe in Novosibirsk in December 2015.

Muslims who exercise their right to freedom of religion and belief by meeting to study Nursi's writings stand accused of "continuing the activities" of "Nurdzhular", a "banned extremist organisation" which Muslims in Russia deny exists but which the Supreme Court banned in April 2008. Typically, such Muslims meet in private homes to study Islam, with one or more expounding on Nursi's works. They also pray, eat, and drink tea together, and do not seek state permission to meet.

Russia has convicted and jailed, fined or otherwise punished numerous Muslims who read Nursi's works – as well as numerous Jehovah's Witnesses – on "extremism"-related charges. These criminal trials continue.

Atadzhanov fled Russia in March 2016 after the FSB security service in Novosibirsk launched an investigation against him and other Muslims under Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 2 ("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").

The FSB Investigator had Atadzhanov added on 18 May 2016 to the Federal Financial Monitoring Service (Rosfinmonitoring) "List of Terrorists and Extremists". Banks are obliged to freeze these people's accounts, only allowing small transactions up to 10,000 Roubles. He remains on the List.

Prosecutors in Blagoveshchensk later opened a separate case against Atadzhanov under Criminal Code Article 282.2.

Atadzhanov is on the Interior Ministry wanted list, for both the Novosibirsk and Blagoveshchensk cases, but with no Criminal Code Article listed. Forum 18 called the Blagoveshchensk listed number on 10 July, but the official refused to give any information, stating that it is "confidential".

The Russian authorities told Atadzhanov's relatives in Russia in May 2018 that they had issued a Red Notice against him, fellow Muslims told Forum 18.

Police of the country where Atadzhanov took refuge also informed him of the Red Notice when they detained him in July 2018 while he was travelling in that country, he told Forum 18 on 8 July. He was held in an extradition detention centre for eleven months, before being released on 27 May 2019. He added that he has never been shown the Red Notice itself.

Atadzhanov lost all attempts to challenge his extradition through the local courts, which ruled that he should be sent back to Russia. However, he was later released from the detention centre, but has to report monthly to the migration service. "The deportation question remains open," he told Forum 18.

Atadzhanov told Forum 18 he is considering challenging the Red Notice through the Commission for the Control of Interpol's Files (CCF). The CCF is the Interpol body which handles complaints that Red Notices are abusive.

Second known Russian Red Notice seeking to punish freedom of religion or belief

Ashurali Magomedshapievich Magomedeminov (born 24 September 1972) is a Muslim who meets with others to study his faith using the works of the late Turkish Muslim theologian Said Nursi. He left Russia to study abroad in autumn 2016, he told Forum 18 on 9 July 2020.

On 21 August 2017, prosecutors launched a criminal case against Magomedeminov under Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 1.1 ("Inclination, recruitment, or other involvement of a person in an extremist organisation"), the Stavropol Regional Investigative Committee announced on its website three days later.

The Investigative Committee said Magomedeminov – who was born in Makhachkala in Dagestan – had committed crimes between June 2015 and July 2016 while living in a rented flat in Pyatigorsk in Stavropol Region. It accused him of dressing in "religious garments", sharing "extremist literature" with his flat mates and those he invited to his flat, and conducting "conspiratorial meetings with other individuals with the aim of recruiting them into the ranks" of the banned Nurdzhular organisation.

On the same day that the criminal case was launched, Prosecutors added Magomedeminov to the federal wanted list, as he was "hiding from the investigation". He remains on the wanted list on the Interior Ministry website, though without any Criminal Code Articles being listed.

The FSB Investigator had Magomedeminov added on 20 November 2017 to the Federal Financial Monitoring Service (Rosfinmonitoring) "List of Terrorists and Extremists". Banks are obliged to freeze these people's accounts, only allowing small transactions up to 10,000 Roubles. He remains on the List.

The Russian authorities issued a Red Notice against Magomedeminov in mid-January 2020. Migration Service officials of the country he now lives in summoned him on about 22 January when they themselves learned of the Red Notice, which appears to have been issued shortly before.

"I explained to them that I read Nursi's works and they understood fully," Magomedeminov told Forum 18. "I have to report once a month to the Migration Service." He added that he has never been shown the Red Notice itself.

Magomedeminov told Forum 18 he is considering challenging the Red Notice through the Commission for the Control of Interpol's Files (CCF). The CCF is the Interpol body which handles complaints that Red Notices are abusive.

"We're still looking for him," an official of the Investigative Committee in the southern Russian city of Pyatigorsk (who did not give her name) told Forum 18 on 7 July. "We're seeking his extradition to the Russian Federation to take a decision on the criminal case against him." The official added that the Investigator in the case, Arut Pogosyan, was unavailable as he is on a one-month holiday.

Asked what Magomedeminov had done that made him an "extremist" who deserved to be prosecuted, the official claimed he had called people to conduct "extremist activity". She refused to give any further information.

Third known Russian Red Notice seeking to punish freedom of religion or belief

Officials of another country told the third individual in summer 2020 that Russia had issued an Interpol Red Notice seeking the individual's detention and extradition back to Russia, friends of the individual told Forum 18.

Prosecutors had the individual added to the Federal Financial Monitoring Service (Rosfinmonitoring) "List of Terrorists and Extremists". Banks are obliged to freeze these people's accounts, only allowing small transactions up to 10,000 Roubles.

The individual is also on the federal wanted list on the Interior Ministry website.

If returned to Russia, the individual faces serious criminal charges related to the exercise of freedom of religion or belief.

Three prisoners of conscience stripped of citizenship

Authorities have stripped Russian citizenship from three men jailed for exercising freedom of religion or belief: Muslim Yevgeny Kim in January 2019, and Jehovah's Witnesses Feliks Makhammadiyev and Konstantin Bazhenov in April 2020. Kim and Makhammadiyev are now stateless. Russia has been trying to deport Kim since 2019, and might try to deport Makhammadiyev and Bazhenov when they complete their jail terms.

By Victoria Arnold

Forum 18 (09.07.2020) - <https://bit.ly/2D2qiGa> - The stripping of Russian citizenship from two men in April – both Jehovah's Witnesses currently in jail (one of them Russian-born) – brings to three the number of people known to have been stripped of Russian citizenship and passports as a direct consequence of being jailed under the Extremism Law for exercising their freedom of religion and belief.

The latest two - Feliks Makhammadiyev and Konstantin Bazhenov from Saratov - were among the first Jehovah's Witnesses to be jailed after the 2017 Supreme Court ban on Jehovah's Witness activity (see below).

The two men are likely to be ordered deported (to Uzbekistan and Ukraine respectively) upon their release, despite their long residence in and close ties to Russia, including being married to Russian citizens (see below).

The Jehovah's Witnesses' citizenship was annulled on the basis of Article 22 of the Citizenship Law, under which conviction for particular criminal offences is taken as equivalent to the provision of false information in a citizenship application (see below).

The first person stripped of his citizenship after being jailed for exercising freedom of religion and belief was Yevgeny Kim (born 5 October 1974), a Muslim jailed in June 2017 for three years nine months for meeting with other Muslims to study Islam using theologian Said Nursi's works. Officials secretly stripped Kim of Russian citizenship in January 2019, leaving him stateless, and on 10 April 2019 – the day he completed his labour camp term – he was fined and ordered deported to Uzbekistan, his country of birth. He has never been an Uzbek citizen.

More than a year after finishing his prison term, Kim remains in a migration detention centre in Khabarovsk.

Jehovah's Witnesses who exercise their right to freedom of religion and belief by meeting for prayer, hymn singing, and Bible study stand accused of "continuing the activities" of the Jehovah's Witness Administrative Centre and its subsidiary local organisations. The Supreme Court ruled them "extremist" and ordered them liquidated in April 2017.

Muslims who exercise their right to freedom of religion and belief by meeting to study Nursi's writings stand accused of "continuing the activities" of "Nurdzhular", a "banned extremist organisation" which Muslims in Russia deny exists but which the Supreme Court banned in April 2008. Typically, such Muslims meet in private homes to study Islam, with one or more expounding on Nursi's works. They also pray, eat, and drink tea together, and do not seek state permission to meet.

Eleven other people - nine Jehovah's Witnesses and two Muslims - are currently serving prison terms under the Extremism Law for exercising their freedom of religion and belief.

Like Kim, one of the two Jehovah's Witnesses, Feliks Makhammadiyev (also Uzbek-born), has been rendered stateless, and so is also likely to be sent to a detention centre after his release from imprisonment. This may last indefinitely if no way of legalising his status can be found. Konstantin Bazhenov, is thought to have retained his Ukrainian citizenship. Both men are married to Russian citizens (see below).

Kim and Makhammadiyev were both tortured. No official suspected of torturing Muslims and Jehovah's Witnesses appears to have been arrested and put on criminal trial for torture, as Russia's international human rights obligations require.

Neither the Federal Human Rights Ombudsperson nor Saratov Region Human Rights Ombudsperson have replied to Forum 18's questions of:

- why Makhammadiyev and Bazhenov had been deprived of citizenship (especially if this would leave Makhammadiyev stateless);
- whether they would be deported;
- what will happen if Uzbekistan or Ukraine refused to accept them;
- and whether deportation would violate their right to family life, given that their spouses are citizens of and resident in Russia (see below).

Legal limbo

The detention of stateless persons awaiting an impossible deportation is a common problem in Russia, where thousands of people do not hold any valid citizenship. They are often former Soviet citizens who for some reason have been unable to obtain any other passport.

Although Kim and Makhammadiyev's cases differ from many others' in that they did become Russian citizens, many years before they were prosecuted, their convictions and the consequent stripping ("annulment") of their citizenship mean that they are now in the same legal limbo. They are unable to live legally in Russia and unable to leave the country legally, unless they manage to obtain identity documents.

It seems likely that Bazhenov's valid Ukrainian passport will allow him to travel to Ukraine or a third country and avoid detention after his release, but authorities have not confirmed any specifics of either Jehovah's Witness' situation, Jehovah's Witness lawyers told Forum 18 on 29 June.

Meanwhile, Russia has issued Red Notices through Interpol seeking the detention and return to Russia of at least three individuals (two Muslims and one of another faith) who

have left the country. All three face criminal prosecution under the Extremism Law for exercising freedom of religion or belief if they are returned.

Two Saratov Jehovah's Witnesses stripped of citizenship

Konstantin Viktorovich Bazhenov (born 10 May 1975) and Feliks Khasanovich Makhammadiyev (born 14 December 1984) were among six Jehovah's Witness men from Saratov convicted on 19 September 2019 under 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").

Judge Dmitry Larin of Saratov's Lenin District Court jailed Bazhenov for three and half years, and Makhammadiyev for three years.

Bazhenov is now imprisoned in Labour Camp No. 3 in Dimitrovgrad (Ulyanovsk Region). His fellow defendants, including Makhammadiyev, are imprisoned in Labour Camp No. 1 in Orenburg.

Makhammadiyev was born on the territory of Uzbekistan when it was part of the Soviet Union, and, according to Jehovah's Witnesses, moved to Saratov in Russia with his mother in 2002, when he was still a minor. In 2008, he renounced his Uzbek citizenship and became a Russian citizen. The decision to strip him of his Russian citizenship has therefore rendered him stateless. His wife, Yevgeniya Lagunova, is also a Russian citizen.

Bazhenov was born in Novgorod in northern European Russia, and moved as a child to Donetsk, in south-eastern Ukraine, when both Ukraine and Russia were part of the Soviet Union. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, he took Ukrainian citizenship. In 2009, he returned to Russia and acquired Russian citizenship, as did his wife, Irina Bazhenova (who is from Ukraine).

Russian law requires anyone applying for Russian citizenship to attest that they will renounce any other citizenship they hold. Makhammadiyev did this; it appears that Bazhenov did not. Actual renunciation of other citizenships does not seem to be enforced by Russia.

Makhammadiyev and his fellow Jehovah's Witnesses at Labour Camp No. 1 in Orenburg stated that when they arrived on 6 February 2020, prison guards tortured them by kicking them and beating them with batons. They were then placed in solitary confinement. Makhammadiyev was hospitalised with kidney damage, a broken rib, and fluid on the lung. Guards also took away the gluten-free food which, as he has coeliac disease, is medically essential for him. No one has been arrested and put on criminal trial for torture, as Russia's international human rights obligations require.

Stripped of citizenship

The Saratov and Belgorod branches of the Interior Ministry, as the agencies which had originally granted Makhammadiyev and Bazhenov Russian citizenship, were also responsible for rescinding it. They did this at the behest of the Saratov Region Prosecutor's Office, which had informed the Interior Ministry of the men's "extremism" convictions and therefore under the Citizenship Law supplying of "false information" as the grounds for annulling their citizenship (see below), Jehovah's Witness lawyers told Forum 18.

Makhammadiyev received a letter dated 23 April 2020, seen by Forum 18, informing him that the Saratov Region branch of the Interior Ministry had, on 17 April 2020, "annulled

the decision to admit [him] to citizenship of the Russian Federation". The letter noted that this had been done on the basis of Lenin District Court's ruling in September 2019. A separate, undated letter added that his passport had been invalidated.

Belgorod Region branch of the Interior Ministry annulled Bazhenov's citizenship on 14 April 2020. The letter informing him of this decision and the cancellation of his passport was dated 30 April 2020.

According to Jehovah's Witness lawyers, it is possible to appeal against the decisions within three months. But Makhammadiyev and Bazhenov received their letters only on 8 May and 15 May 2020 respectively, meaning that several weeks that could have been used to prepare appeals were lost.

Russian law appears to have no mechanism of appeal specific to the annulment of citizenship, but Makhammadiyev and Bazhenov may be able to lodge administrative suits challenging the actions of the Saratov and Belgorod branches of the Interior Ministry. There are, however, almost no examples of such challenges in the area of citizenship, ADC Memorial noted to Forum 18 on 9 July.

Kim was not notified of being stripped of his citizenship in January 2019 until April 2019, also obstructing the possibility of his making an appeal.

Forum 18 wrote to Federal Human Rights Ombudsperson Tatyana Moskalkova and Saratov Region Human Rights Ombudsperson Tatyana Zhurik on 28 May, asking:

- why Makhammadiyev and Bazhenov had been deprived of citizenship (especially if this would leave Makhammadiyev stateless);
- whether they would be deported;
- what will happen if Uzbekistan or Ukraine refused to accept them;
- and whether deportation would violate their right to family life, given that their spouses are citizens of and resident in Russia

Saratov Region Human Rights Ombudsperson Zhurik replied on 5 June that she could not provide any information.

The Federal Ombudsperson's Office had not replied by the middle of the working day in Moscow on 9 July.

Makhammadiyev's, Bazhenov's and Yevgeny Kim's are so far the only cases known so far of stripping of citizenship used against those convicted for exercising their freedom of religion and belief. Jehovah's Witness lawyers think it will "definitely affect" other Jehovah's Witnesses who may have acquired Russian citizenship through naturalisation.

Deportation to follow?

Both Bazhenov and Makhammadiyev were in detention for most of the time they were under investigation, and were detained again while their appeal was pending.

Under amendments to Criminal Code Article 72, signed into law in July 2018, one day in custody is taken as equivalent to a day and half in a general-regime labour camp ("correctional colony"). Makhammadiyev is due for release in December 2020 or January 2021, while Bazhenov appears likely to be released in September 2021.

Upon their release, it is likely that Bazhenov will be ordered deported to Ukraine and Makhammadiyev to Uzbekistan. The Russian migration authorities have not yet issued

any official notification of deportation, Jehovah's Witness lawyers told Forum 18 on 29 June.

Forum 18 put questions in writing to: Aleksey Zelepukin, head of the Department for Migration Issues at the Saratov Region branch of the Interior Ministry, on 22 May; Saratov Region Prosecutor's Office on 29 June; and the Department for Migration Issues at the Belgorod Region branch of the Interior Ministry on 29 June. All were asked:

- whether Makhammadiyev and Bazhenov will be deported upon their release and what will happen if Uzbekistan and Ukraine refuse to accept them;
- who initiated the process of depriving them of citizenship;
- and whether there is any possibility of their remaining in Russia, given their family ties.

Only Saratov Senior Assistant Prosecutor for Press and Public Relations replied. Tatyana Kazachenko told Forum 18 on 3 July that the matter did not fall within the competence of the prosecutor's office and that the request should be sent to the Saratov branch of the Interior Ministry. By the middle of the working day on 9 July they had not replied to the same questions put to them on 22 May.

Makhammadiyev, as a now-stateless person, has no country to which he can be deported. Bazhenov has Ukrainian citizenship, but Jehovah's Witnesses "do not know exactly how the authorities will act after his release: either by deportation or simply by giving him an order to leave Russia".

It is unclear whether this process will take the same form as in Yevgeny Kim's case, involving administrative prosecution and detention. Bazhenov's Ukrainian passport is likely to protect him from this, but Makhammadiyev, as a stateless person whom Uzbekistan has no obligation to accept, may be caught up in the legal limbo which afflicts many hundreds of former Soviet citizens in Russia and be subject to indefinite detention.

Kim has tried to bring legal appeals against his detention.

"Easy for courts to dismiss all motions for early release filed by foreign citizens"

Makhammadiyev's and Bazhenov's loss of citizenship means that they will be ineligible for parole, as no bilateral agreement exists to regulate their behaviour after release (as required by Supreme Court Plenum Resolution No. 8 of 21 April 2009). Russia has not, in fact, ratified any such bilateral agreement with any state.

For the now-stateless Makhammadiyev, this would in any case be impossible.

"This has made it easy for Russian courts to dismiss all motions for early release filed by foreign citizens on purely technical grounds (i.e. the absence of a bilateral agreement)," Jehovah's Witness lawyers told Forum 18 on 3 June.

On 23 June 2020, Lgov District Court in Kursk Region ordered that Danish citizen and Jehovah's Witness Dennis Christensen should be released early from his jail sentence. He had been sentenced to six years in February 2019.

This, however, did not constitute parole but took place under Article 175, Part 3 of the Criminal Enforcement Code, which allows for the replacement of the unspent part of a sentence with a lighter punishment (for Christensen, a 400,000 Rouble fine) – therefore, no bilateral agreement between Russia and Denmark was necessary.

It is theoretically possible that this option is also open to Makhammadiyev and Bazhenov, but the situation remains unclear at present, particularly for Makhammadiyev.

As they do not have the documentation allowing them to reside in Russia (a visa, temporary resident permit, or permanent resident permit), however, early release may simply lead to detention in a migration detention centre, Jehovah's Witness lawyers pointed out to Forum 18 on 9 July. In such facilities, "Living conditions are usually worse than in penal colonies and family visits are practically impossible", they added. Human rights groups have similarly noted this.

Prosecutors have appealed against Christensen's early release, meaning that he remains imprisoned. It is unknown when Kursk Regional Court will consider the prosecutors' appeal.

Legal grounds for deprivation of citizenship

Article 6 of the Russian Constitution states that a person cannot be stripped of his or her citizenship. Bazhenov, Makhmadiyev, and Kim, however, were all stripped of their Russian citizenship on the basis of an amendment to Article 22 of the Citizenship Law which entered legal force on 1 September 2017.

Citizenship Law Article 22 states that citizenship can be annulled if it was awarded on the basis of forged documents or "false information". Under the 2017 amendment, conviction under some articles of the Criminal Code is taken as equivalent to knowingly presenting false information in a citizenship application. Among the named Criminal Code articles are 282.2 ("Organising" or "Participating 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") and 282.3 ("Financing extremist activity").

These Criminal Code articles are used to prosecute Jehovah's Witnesses and Muslim readers of Nursi's works. As a result, therefore, authorities may annul the citizenship of a person who has been found guilty of one of these offences, and who acquired Russian citizenship by naturalisation (rather than by birth).

International human rights standards, Constitutional Court

Russia is not a party to two international conventions aimed at preventing statelessness. It has not acceded to the 1961 United Nations Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness. In November 1997 it signed but has not yet ratified the Council of Europe's 1997 European Convention on Nationality. Therefore neither convention is in force in Russia.

However, the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) in Strasbourg ruled in July 2014 that Russia had violated several articles of the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms in relation to a stateless person held in a St Petersburg detention centre in for two years because he could not be deported to his birthplace of Uzbekistan (Application No. 44260/13).

The ECtHR stipulated in its judgment that Russia should adopt measures to ensure court oversight of the detention of stateless persons.

In May 2017, Russia's Constitutional Court ruled that two Articles of the Administrative Code were unconstitutional and should be changed. The Articles were unconstitutional as they do not permit stateless persons, who had been ordered deported and sent to migration detention centres, to appeal in court against their continued detention if there is no prospect of their being expelled from the country. However, neither Administrative Code article has yet been changed.

Special bimonthly FORB digest (01-15.07.2020)

15.07.20 - In the Tomsk Region, there were five searches of Jehovah's Witnesses.

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2020/07/16.html>

In the morning of 14 July 2020, the Investigation Committee and FSB conducted searches in the town of Seversk. Ten men and women were taken to the security services for interrogation.

Continue reading...

14.07.20- Caution, the doors are about to be kicked in! More and more house searches of believers.

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2020/07/14.html>

The number of searches of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia continues to increase after the April 2017 Supreme Court [decision](#). By mid-July 2020, more than 1000 home invasions of these law-abiding citizens had already been recorded.

Continue reading...

13.07.20 - In the Moscow region, law enforcers searched the apartment of a 70-year-old woman after her grandson told the military committee about his faith.

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2020/07/12.html>

July 7, 2020 in the city of Likino-Dulevo, Moscow region law enforcement officers invaded the apartment of 20-year-old Kirill Leonov and his grandmother. After the search, Kirill was interrogated for 2 hours at the police department about his faith.

Continue reading...

13.07.20 - In Kaliningrad, the FSB detained at least 12 people for interrogation.

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2020/07/11.html>

On July 11th in Kaliningrad, armed security services conducted a series of searches of believers. At least 12 people were taken to the FSB department in Kaliningrad for interrogation. A criminal case has been initiated against Mikhail Kopytov, 52. Whether anyone remains in custody is still unknown.

Continue reading...

13.07.20 - A wave of searches of believers in the Kemerovo Region. At least one person with disability was detained for 48 hours

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2020/07/9.html>

On July 12, 2020, FSB officers conducted searches of Jehovah's Witnesses in Prokopyevsk. Andrei Vlasov, 51, who has a disability, was detained for 2 days and is in an isolation ward in Kemerovo. The news is being updated.

Continue reading...

11.07.20 - Dennis Christensen has been released from a special punishment block after being held there for 15 days.

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2020/07/8.html>

On July 11, 2020, the 15-day arrest period of Dennis Christensen, who was [sent to a punishment cell](#) on fabricated charges, came to an end. He is in good spirits. His defense team plans to appeal his fine and hope to achieve commutation of the sanctions imposed on him.

Continue reading...

9.07.20 - The prosecutor's request includes seven years of corrective penal colony for Yevgeniy Spirin, despite an obvious fabrication of charges.

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2020/07/7.html>

On July 9, 2020, the prosecutor demanded to sentence 34-year-old [Yevgeny Spirin](#) to 7 years of colony, baselessly considering religious conversations extremist.

Continue reading...

08.07.20 - Vladimir Alushkin may be placed under arrest for the third time. Cassation Court will review the appeal decision to overturn the sentence.

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2020/07/5.html>

On July 9, 2020, the First Cassation Court of the Saratov Jurisdiction will be holding a hearing to review a complaint from the Prosecutor's Office. The complaint objects to the Appeals Court's overturned conviction of Vladimir Alushkin, a worshiper from the city of Penza. Depending on the Cassation Court's decision, Alushkin may be placed into custody once again.

Continue reading...

06.07.20 - In Krasnodar Region two more local residents prosecuted for their faith. They are accused of preaching.

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2020/07/4.html>

Almost 2 months after the [searches](#) in the village of Pavlovskaya, officers of the Federal Security Service of Russia in Krasnodar region initiated criminal proceedings against two more believers: 58-year-old Vladimir Skachidub and 39-year-old Maxim Beltikov.

Continue reading...

02.07.20 - A new wave of searches in the District of Primorye, where 12 cases against worshipers are underway.

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2020/07/3.html>

On July 2, 2020, starting at 8 a.m., searches began in at least six families of Jehovah's Witnesses from the village of Tavrichanka. Three believers were known to have been taken away for questioning. The searches were authorized by Marina Gerasimova, judge of the Nadezhda district court.

Continue reading...

02.07.20 - What did the prison and prosecutor's office do to prevent the Danish believer Dennis Christensen from going free?

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2020/07/2.html>

On June 26, 2020, the Lgov prison authorities illegally placed Dennis Christensen in a cell of a special punishment block (EPKT), typically used for malicious offenders.

Continue reading...

Jehovah's Witness Dennis Christensen's release blocked by the Prosecutor's Office

HRWF (03.07.2020) - Danish Jehovah's Witness Dennis Christensen's early release has been halted because a prosecutor, Mr. Aleksei Shatunov, has filed to appeal the June 23 ruling allowing his liberation.

Dennis Christensen's alleged "crimes" were participating in discussions about a religious publication, helping organize worshippers to maintain the upkeep of their Kingdom Hall, and persuade people to take part on religious services.

In 2017, Russia's Supreme Court banned all Jehovah's Witnesses congregations, 395 in all, and confiscated all their properties. The ruling declared Jehovah's Witnesses Administrative Center in St Petersburg an extremist organization, and banned all the activities of the group and its members.

Dennis Christensen was the first person to be sentenced to a prison term after the ban. It appears the prosecutor's office is using new trumped-up charges against Dennis to appeal the decision that the prosecutor's office originally supported. It will likely take weeks before a court hearing is scheduled.

Jarrold Lopes, spokesman for Jehovah's Witnesses, states: "This is very upsetting news for Dennis, Irina, and the millions around the world who have been following his three-year legal battle in the international media. Dennis has applied for early release four times. The prison administration has persisted in sabotaging Dennis' parole applications

by falsely accusing him of misconduct. This latest move by the prosecutor's office and prison authorities is nothing short of ruthless."

Dennis has already served more than half of his six-year prison sentence. For over a year, he has been eligible for parole or a mitigation of his sentence. After submitting three applications, all of which were ignored, his fourth request finally went to court. On June 23, 2020, the Lgov District Court ordered the remaining part of his sentence to be replaced with a fine. A prosecutor who took part in the parole hearing, Mr. Artem Kofanov, supported the mitigation of the punishment.

Two days later, another prosecutor, Mr. Aleksei Shatunov, asserted that the court ruling was illegal, demanded that it be canceled, and called for a new trial at the same court but with a different judge. Mr. Shatunov based his request on negative reports by the Lgov prison administration that claimed Dennis lacked "a favorable record of work and public life at the correctional facility."

During Dennis' June 23 parole hearing, prison representatives had attempted to make similar arguments, but the judge determined that these arguments were invalid. The defense lawyer showed the court medical documents confirming that Dennis' health limitations excluded him from physical labor in the prison. In turn, while testifying, a prison representative admitted that they had no work available that would accommodate Dennis' physical limitations.

While the prosecutor's office began seeking the appeal of Dennis' early release, prison authorities filed two reports against him. The first claimed that he was in the dining hall at the wrong time, and the second claimed that he was in the barracks in a T-shirt without a jacket. For these reasons, prison authorities placed Dennis in the EPKT for ten days. According to Russian law, authorities can only take such measures when a prisoner repeatedly commits a serious violation of prison rules, and even then, only after the prisoner receives a medical examination. Since this criteria was never met in Dennis' case, there was no basis for placing him in the EPKT.

Dennis and another prisoner share a cell measuring about three meters (10 ft) by two meters (7 ft). The room lacks proper ventilation and has mold, which further threatens Dennis' poor health. He suffered from pneumonia just a few months ago and has been diagnosed with a serious spinal cord condition. Dennis' lawyer revealed that "the administration of the penal colony is aware of this, but has placed him in conditions where he has to sleep on a hard bed, causing excruciating pain."

Dennis told his lawyer that at the time of the alleged violations, there were other prisoners with him but only he was sent to the EPKT. Brother Christensen's lawyer stated, "This leads us to believe that this was all part of a coordinated plan to prevent Dennis from being released by court order."

Interview opportunities

Dennis' lawyer, Anton Bogdanov: dbhukukcu@gmail.com; or call +7903-45-43-037

Dennis' wife, Irina: +7 920 284-92-10 (via Telegram app)

Dennis is the first of over 170 Jehovah's Witnesses who have spent time in prison or pretrial detention in modern Russia. See link to [infographic](#).

Nationwide Persecution (Russia and Crimea)

353 under criminal investigation

35 in prison (10 convicted; 25 pretrial detention)

24 under house arrest

973 homes raided since 2017 Supreme Court ruling (176 raided in 2020—even during the COVID-19 pandemic)

Additional information: Human Rights Watch (<https://bit.ly/3dSIzvn>) – Amnesty International (<https://bit.ly/2D9UTe5>)

[Read on HRWF.eu](#)

Special bimonthly FORB digest (17.06-01.07.2020)

01.07.20 - Dennis Christensen back to his cell

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2020/07/1.html>

On June 26, 2020, the Kursk Prosecutor for the Oversight of Correctional Services appealed the court decision on mitigation of punishment to Dennis Christensen. On the same day, the colony staff illegally placed him for 10 days in a special detention facility designed for malicious violators of prison rules.

[Continue reading...](#)

29.06.20 - Russian human rights organizations filed a report with the UN Human Rights Committee

Twelve Russian NGOs, including SOVA Center, submitted a brief joint report to the UN Human Rights Committee for preliminary hearings at the upcoming session of the Committee on Russia's next report on compliance with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. SOVA Center has authored a section on abuses of anti-extremist policies

[Continue reading...](#)

25.06.20 - Persecuted Siberian shaman gets international support

Link to full text in Russian: https://memohrc.org/ru/news_old/memorial-priznal-politzaklyuchyonnym-yakutskogo-shamana-aleksandra-gabysheva

The Memorial Human Rights Center considers Alexander Gabyshev to be a political prisoner, according to the international leadership, based on the definition of this concept. The denial of liberty has been applied to him exclusively because of his political and religious convictions.

[Continue reading...](#)

25.06.20 - Russian church leader promotes Putin's changes in constitution

Link to full text in Russian: <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=dujour&div=390>

Patriarch of Moscow and all-Rus Kirill, on Thursday morning, supported amendments to the fundamental law of Russia, having voted for them early in his residence in the St. Daniel's monastery of Moscow.

[Continue reading...](#)

23.06.20 - The Court ordered to free Dennis Christensen, one of Jehovah's Witness from Denmark. For his faith, he stayed in prison for 1128 days

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2020/06/16.html>

On June 23, 2020, at 19:50 Lgov district court, considering Dennis Christensen's petition for mitigation of his sentence, replaced his unexpired part of the prison term with a fine of 400,000 rubles. A Jehovah's Witness convicted of faith will be released after the court ruling enters into force.

[Continue reading...](#)

19.06.20 - "FSB for 33rd Guards Rocket Army" Enters Into Battle With Believers in Krasnoyarsk Territory

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2020/06/15.html>

On June 18, 2020 in the town of Nazarovo there were [mass searches](#) in the homes of local believers. An armed detachment of security officers invaded the homes of the Shulyuk spouses. As a result, Ivan Shulyuk, 43, was detained.

[Continue reading...](#)

19.06.20 - The Court will decide on Dennis Christensen's parole on June 23. Pressure on the believer continues in the colony

Link to full text in Russian: jw-russia.org/news/2020/06/14.html

On June 23, 2020, Judge of the Lgov district court of Kursk region Galina Petlitsa will consider the issue of early release of the Danish citizen Dennis Christensen, one of Jehovah's Witness, convicted for his faith for 6 years in prison.

[Continue reading...](#)

18.06.20 - A special operation against Jehovah's Witnesses is being carried out in the Town of Nazarovo, Krasnoyarsk Region

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2020/06/13.html>

In the morning of June 18, 2020, security forces came with searches in houses of peaceful law-abiding believers. Preliminary reports indicate that 15 families have been searched. The news is being supplemented.

[Continue reading...](#)

16.06.20 - Case of Crimean Muslims

This case defendants are accused of membership in Muslim religious organizations or propa- ganda of activities of the organizations that are declared terrorist or extremist in the RF though they are not according to the Ukrainian laws.

In May the total number of Crimean residents deprived of liberty under the 'Case of Crimean Muslims' was 65 persons. 4 more people are under the movement restriction: 3 are subject to supervision, and are not allowed to leave the occupied territory, and 1 is on house arrest.

[Continue reading...](#)

Russian human rights organizations filed a report with the UN Human Rights Committee

Sova-Center (29.06.2020) - <https://www.sova-center.ru/en/religion/publications/2020/06/d42595/> Twelve Russian NGOs, including SOVA Center, submitted a brief joint report to the UN Human Rights Committee for preliminary hearings at the upcoming session of the Committee on Russia's next report on compliance with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. SOVA Center has authored a section on abuses of anti-extremist policies.

A regular session of the UN Human Rights Committee opens on June 29, 2020. In the course of this session, the Committee will give preliminary consideration to the latest report submitted by Russia on its compliance with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

In accordance with the procedure, during the session, the Committee will also consider alternative reports on the same topic from various public associations including those from Russia (they are all available on the UN website). After reviewing the country's report and taking the alternative reports into account, the HR Committee will pose questions to the government once the session ends. The report along with Russia's responses will be given final consideration in 2021.

The alternative reports also include a very concise report compiled by twelve Russian NGOs. SOVA Center presented a section on abuses of anti-extremist policies, in particular as they relate to freedom of conscience.

We ask the HR Committee to pose the following questions to the Government of the Russian Federation:

1. Does the Russian Federation plan to revise the definition of extremist activity, found in the law on countering such activity, in order to narrow down and clarify it, as recommended?
2. What changes in the legislation or in related commentary are planned in order to ensure that statements or other acts that do not constitute a significant public danger are not punished as extremist crimes and offenses? This pertains primarily to the use of the Criminal Code articles that cover justification of terrorism, incitement to extremist activity and continuing the activities (including religious ones) of organizations banned as extremist.

The text of the report by the twelve NGOs can be downloaded on the website of the Human Rights Center "Memorial" in Russian and English.

On the UN website the report is available in English only.

A Russian court grants parole to Jehovah's Witness Dennis Christensen

***Dennis Christensen has been on HRWF's database of FoRB prisoners since 2017.
HRWF welcomes this decision as it has heavily campaigned for years for its
release***

HRWF (24.06.2020) - On 23 June, the Lgovskiy District Court in the Kursk Region decided to grant early release to Danish Jehovah's Witness Dennis Christensen. The judge mitigated the remainder of Dennis' sentence to a fine of RUB 400,000 (about \$6,000). He will be released upon payment.

Christensen was already eligible for early release a year ago because of time served in pre-trial detention, but prison authorities rejected his previous requests.

Jarrold Lopes, spokesman for Jehovah's Witnesses, states: "Judge Galina Petlitsa's ruling is in line with last month's call by the U.N. Working Group on Arbitrary Detention's for Russia to immediately release all of Jehovah's Witnesses, especially considering the threat of COVID-19 in prison. We are pleased that Dennis may be going home to his wife, family, and friends in the coming weeks. However, it is unconscionable, after Dennis' harrowing experiences in prison, that he should have to pay a fine. Today's ruling also does not erase the fact that Dennis, a peaceful Christian believer, still has to bear the unjust stigma of being convicted as an extremist."

Dennis has spent over 3 years in prison since being arrested on 25 May 2017. For over a year now, Dennis has qualified to apply for early release from his six-year sentence. This is because he spent some two years in pretrial detention and, according to Russian law, pretrial detention is applied 1.5 times toward his sentence.

Dennis has applied for parole four times, but today was Dennis's first parole hearing. His first three requests were denied during the application process. Up until now, the prison administration has persisted in sabotaging Dennis' parole applications by falsely accusing him of misconduct. They even planted a knife in his cell.

Dennis' health has deteriorated during his imprisonment. He contracted pneumonia. Although he recovered, he is still suffering from a deteriorated immune system. According to his lawyer, Dennis' medical records were recently "lost," and prison authorities were using this as a pretext to discontinue his medical treatment.

Interview opportunities

- Dennis' lawyer, Anton Bogdanov: dbhukukcu@gmail.com; or call +7903-45-43-037
- Dennis' wife, Irina: +7 920 284-92-10 (via Telegram app)

Dennis is the first of 175 Jehovah's Witnesses who have spent time in prison or pretrial detention in modern Russia. See link to [infographic](#).

Nationwide Persecution (Russia and Crimea)

353 under criminal investigation
34 in prison (10 convicted; 24 pretrial detention)
24 under house arrest

970 homes raided since 2017 Supreme Court ruling (170 raided in 2020—even during the COVID-19 pandemic)

Source: **Jarrold Lopes, Communications Officer and Spokesman**, Office of Public Information, World Headquarters of Jehovah's Witnesses.
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1 Kings Drive, Tuxedo Park New York, USA

Currently jailed, serving suspended sentences, fined – list

Eleven people are serving prison terms and eight suspended sentences under the Extremism Law for exercising their freedom of religion and belief. A further seven have been fined. One man was sentenced to assigned labour, but this was changed on appeal. Of these, 25 are Jehovah's Witnesses, and two are Muslims who met with others to study the works of the Turkish theologian Said Nursi.

By Victoria Arnold

Forum 18 (23.06.2020) - <https://bit.ly/2EG5Qo8> - Twenty-seven people have recently been convicted or are currently serving sentences under the Extremism Law for exercising their freedom of religion and belief. Of these, 25 are Jehovah's Witnesses, and two are Muslims who met with others to study the works of the Turkish theologian Said Nursi.

Those convicted include three women and 24 men. Eleven people are serving prison terms (all men), eight suspended sentences (two women, six men), and seven fines (one woman, six men). One man was sentenced to assigned labour, but this was changed on appeal (see below).

The most recent jailing was of 61-year-old Jehovah's Witness Gennady Shpakovsky. On 9 June, a court in Pskov in northern European Russia handed him a six and a half year prison term (see below).

A court today (23 June) ordered that jailed Jehovah's Witness Dennis Christensen's remaining sentence should be commuted to a fine of 400,000 Roubles. Held since his May 2017 arrest, he expects to be freed in ten days' time, unless the Prosecutor appeals (see below).

Jehovah's Witnesses who exercise their right to freedom of religion and belief by meeting for prayer, hymn singing, and Bible study stand accused of "continuing the activities" of the Jehovah's Witness Administrative Centre and its subsidiary local organisations. The Supreme Court ruled them "extremist" and ordered them liquidated in April 2017.

Muslims who exercise their right to freedom of religion and belief by meeting to study Nursi's writings stand accused of "continuing the activities" of "Nurdzhular", a "banned extremist organisation" which Muslims in Russia deny exists but which the Supreme Court banned in April 2008. Typically, such Muslims meet in private homes to study Islam, with one or more expounding on Nursi's works. They also pray, eat, and drink tea together, and do not seek state permission to meet.

Both Muslims and Jehovah's Witnesses have been tortured, but no officials accused in cases of torture of individuals detained for exercising freedom of religion or belief appear to have been arrested or put on criminal trial.

Crimea convictions

Russia also uses the same "extremism"-related punishments in Crimea, which it occupied in March 2014.

A Simferopol court jailed Muslim prisoner of conscience Renat Suleimanov for four years in January 2019 for meeting openly in mosques with three friends to discuss their faith. He was transferred to a labour camp in Russia's Kabardino-Balkariya Region to serve his sentence. The three other Muslims in the same case were given two and a half year suspended sentences, when they live under restrictions.

Two Jehovah's Witnesses were given six year jail terms in 2020. Sergei Filatov, who was sentenced in March, has been transferred to Russia to serve his sentence. Artyom Gerasimov, who was sentenced in March and sent to prison on appeal in June, is expected to be transferred to a prison in Russia.

The 1949 Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War covers the rights of civilians in territories occupied by another state (described as "protected persons"). Article 76 includes the provision: "Protected persons accused of offences shall be detained in the occupied country, and if convicted they shall serve their sentences therein."

Criminal Code Articles

Most prosecutions within Russia's internationally recognised borders have been brought under Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 1 (Organisation of) or Part 2 ("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").

The possible punishments are:

- Article 282.2, Part 1 – six to ten years' imprisonment; or a fine of 400,000 to 800,000 Roubles;
- Article 282.2, Part 2 – two to six years' imprisonment; or one to four years' assigned labour; or a fine of 300,000 to 600,000 Roubles.

Fifteen people – two Muslims, 13 Jehovah's Witnesses – have been convicted under Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 1 (11 were imprisoned, two received suspended sentences, two were fined).

Twelve people – all Jehovah's Witnesses - have been convicted under Article 282.2, Part 2 (seven suspended sentences, five fines, one assigned labour sentence).

Investigators are also charging an increasing number of people under Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 1.1 ("Inclination, recruitment, or other involvement of a person in an extremist organisation"), or Criminal Code Article 282.3, Part 1 ("Financing of extremist activity").

The possible punishments are:

- Article 282.2, Part 1.1 – four to eight years' imprisonment; or two to five years' assigned labour; or a fine of 300,000 to 700,000 Roubles;
- Article 282.3, Part 1 – three to eight years' imprisonment; or one to four years' assigned labour; or a fine of 300,000 to 700,000 Roubles.

Two people were handed jail sentences after having been convicted under multiple Criminal Code articles. Both were convicted under Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 1. One Muslim (Ilgar Vagif-ogly Aliyev) has also been convicted and is currently serving a sentence under Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 1.1. One Jehovah's Witness (Gennady Valerianovich Shpakovsky) has also been convicted under Criminal Code Article 282.3, Part 1 (the sentence will go into force should he lose his appeal).

The most recent conviction under multiple Criminal Code Articles was Jehovah's Witness Gennady Shpakovsky, who received a six and a half year jail term on 9 June 2020. According to the written verdict, the aim of FSB surveillance was to document the fact that the organisation was continuing its activities, not to uncover "extremist" activity. Hymn singing, prayer, discussion of preaching skills, and the collection of donations were taken as evidence of continuing activities. It appears, therefore, that people accused do not have to engage in any activity which is itself considered "extremist" in order to be charged with allegedly "extremism"-related offences. The verdict indicates that charges may be brought if they do anything which was previously part of the activities of a now-prohibited organisation.

Deprived of Russian citizenship, left stateless, fined, ordered deported

Muslim Yevgeny Lvovich Kim is also still in custody after being stripped of his Russian citizenship and left stateless as a result of his conviction, in June 2017, under Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 1 and Criminal Code Article 282, Part 1 ("Actions directed at the incitement of hatred [nenavist] or enmity [vrazhda], as well as the humiliation of an individual or group of persons on the basis of sex, race, nationality, language, origin, attitude to religion, or social group").

On his release on 10 April 2019, after serving nearly 20 months of his sentence of three years and nine months, Kim was charged with violating migration law, fined, ordered deported to Uzbekistan (his birthplace, though he has never held Uzbek citizenship, and itself a serious violator of the right to freedom of religion and belief).

Prisoner of conscience Kim remains in a temporary detention centre for foreign nationals in Khabarovsk.

Punishments

Assigned labour may take the form of any job in any organisation, as determined by the correctional centre administering the sentence, usually taking into account an individual's age, gender, health, ability to work, and occupational speciality. The work is paid, but deductions of 5 to 20 per cent may be made from wages and handed to the relevant regional body of the prison service.

Should a convicted person abscond or break the rules, the sentence will be replaced by imprisonment for the same duration. Only one Jehovah's Witness – Valery Moskalenko – is known to have received an assigned labour sentence, and he was not required to serve it (see below).

So far, all Jehovah's Witnesses and Muslims who have received jail sentences have been sent to a general-regime labour camp ("correctional colony" - ispravitel'naya koloniya),

These are invariably not in the regions where they lived, and often long distances from home.

Labour camps ("correctional colonies"), where the majority of Russian prisoners serve their terms, are classified as special-, strict-, general-, or open-regime. The general regime is reserved for first-time "serious" offenders (and those imprisoned for low- and medium-severity crimes if the open regime is considered unsuitable). Most prisoners must work during their sentences, often in textile and timber production. Most of their wages are paid to the prison service, not to those who do the work.

Additional punishments

Most Jehovah's Witnesses and Muslims prosecuted for alleged "extremism"-related offences are added to the Federal Financial Monitoring Service (Rosfinmonitoring) "List of Terrorists and Extremists". Banks are obliged to freeze these people's accounts, only allowing small transactions up to 10,000 Roubles.

The majority of those who receive a jail sentence are subject to certain restrictions upon their release. These may include a night-time curfew, a ban leaving one's home town, and a requirement to report to probation authorities a certain number of times per month.

Under the Criminal Code, such restrictions may last for one to two years under Article 282.2, Part 1 and Part 1.1, and up to one year under Part 2.

Judges may also prohibit people from doing particular jobs or activities, such as a ban on attending public events, a ban on posting material on the internet, or a ban on leadership of and participation in the exercise of freedom of religion and belief. Such restrictions may also be applied to those who receive suspended sentences.

Multiple trials

Five Jehovah's Witnesses who appear on the list below are currently on trial for a second time for a more serious alleged offence. In February 2020, Stanislav Kim and Nikolay Polevodov were given suspended sentences under Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 2 ("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"). Both have also been charged under Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 1 for "leading" such activities, and throughout their Part 2 trial, appeared alongside four other Jehovah's Witnesses at a different court in Khabarovsk, in proceedings which are still underway.

Venera and Darya Dulova and Aleksandr Pryanikov, also given suspended sentences under Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 2, are now being investigated under Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 1.1 ("Inclination, recruitment, or other involvement of a person in an extremist organisation"). It is unknown when this case will reach court.

Six more Jehovah's Witnesses were convicted in Penza on 13 December 2019 under Criminal Code Article 282.2, Parts 1 and 2, but are now undergoing a retrial after an appeal court overturned the guilty verdict and sent their case back for re-examination. Proceedings in their second trial were halted on 14 May 2020 because of the coronavirus pandemic, and do not yet appear to have resumed.

Those named below do not include those convicted within Crimea, which is outside Russia's internationally-recognised borders.

Prisoner to be freed after remaining term turned to fine?

On 23 June 2020, a judge ruled that Dennis Ole Christensen, a Danish citizen who was the first Jehovah's Witness to be convicted and imprisoned for "continuing the activities of a banned extremist organisation", should be released early from his prison term. This is the first time a court has decided to change the remaining term of a Jehovah's Witness prisoner's sentence to a non-custodial punishment.

Judge Galina Petlitsa of Lgov District Court in Kursk Region decided that Christensen's remaining sentence should be commuted to a fine of 400,000 Roubles. If the prosecution does not appeal, the ruling will come into force in ten days' time, and Christensen should then be allowed to leave Labour Camp No. 3 in Lgov and return to his home in Oryol. He would be under no further restrictions.

Christensen was found guilty under Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 1 on 6 February 2019 and sentenced to six years' imprisonment, of which he was due to serve about three years. He stood accused of "continuing the activities" of the local Jehovah's Witness registered religious organisation in Oryol, which had been declared "extremist" by a local court and liquidated in 2016, before the nationwide ban. He had previously applied for early release three times, but had been turned down during the application process.

=====

List of those convicted on "extremism"-related charges for exercising freedom of religion or belief, by category of punishment (regional headings refer to where people were tried, not where they are imprisoned).

CURRENT IMPRISONMENTS

- Republic of Dagestan

Izberbash City Court

28 May 2018

1) Ilgar Vagif-ogly Aliyev (born 16 February 1977) – 8 years + 2 years' restrictions on freedom

Criminal Code Articles: 282.2, Part 1; 282.2, Part 1.1

Appeal: unsuccessful – 25 July 2018, Supreme Court of the Republic of Dagestan

Prison address: 410086, Saratovskaya oblast, g. Saratov, Peschano-Umetsky trakt, p. Yelshanka, FKU Ispravitel'naya koloniya No. 33 UFSIN Rossii po Saratovskoy oblasti

Lenin District Court, Makhachkala

7 November 2017

2) Artur Abdulgamidovich Kaltuyev (born 15 June 1986) – 3 years

Criminal Code Article: 282.2, Part 1

Appeal: unsuccessful – 10 January 2018, Supreme Court of the Republic of Dagestan

Prison address: 309850, Belgorodskaya oblast, g. Alekseyevka, ul. Privokzal'naya 2A, FKU Ispravitel'naya koloniya No. 4 UFSIN Rossii po Belgorodskoy oblasti

- Oryol Region

Railway District Court, Oryol

6 February 2019

3) Dennis Ole Christensen (born 18 December 1972 – Danish citizen) – 6 years

Criminal Code Article: 282.2, Part 1

Appeal: unsuccessful – 23 May 2019, Oryol Regional Court

Prison address: 307754 Kurskaya oblast, g. Lgov, ul. Primakova 23A, FKU Ispravitelnaya koloniya No. 3 UFSIN Rossii po Kurskoy oblasti

On 23 June 2020, Lgov District Court decided that Christensen's remaining sentence should be commuted to a fine of 400,000 Roubles. He expects to be freed in ten days' time (see above).

- Pskov Region

Pskov City Court

9 June 2020

4) Gennady Valerianovich Shpakovsky (born 6 October 1958) – 6 years and 6 months + 1 year's restrictions on freedom + 3-year ban on leadership of and participation in the exercise of freedom of religion and belief

Criminal Code Articles: 282.2, Part 1; 282.3, Part 1

Appeal: lodged at Pskov Regional Court on 15 June 2020

Prison address: 180000 Pskovskaya oblast, g. Pskov, ulitsa Nekrasova 39, FKU SIZO-1 (while appeal is pending)

- Saratov Region

Lenin District Court, Saratov

19 September 2019

5) Konstantin Viktorovich Bazhenov (born 10 May 1975) – 3 years and 6 months

6) Aleksey Vladimirovich Budenchuk (born 27 July 1982) – 3 years and 6 months

7) Gennady Vasilyevich German (born 12 June 1969) – 2 years and 6 months

8) Roman Aleksandrovich Gridasov (16 September 1978) – 2 years and 6 months

9) Feliks Khasanovich Makhammadiyev (born 14 December 1984) – 3 years

10) Aleksey Petrovich Miretsky (born 14 December 1975) – 2 years and 6 months

All six also have 1 year's restrictions on freedom + 5-year ban on holding leadership positions in any public organisation

Some of the six have been tortured

Criminal Code Article: 282.2, Part 1

Appeal: unsuccessful – 20 December 2019, Saratov Regional Court

Prison address: Bazhenov – 433510 Ulyanovskaya oblast, g. Dimitrovgrad, ul. Osipenko 22, FKU Ispravitelnaya koloniya No. 3 UFSIN Rossii po Ulyanovskoy oblasti; others – 460026, g. Orenburg, Krymsky pereulok 119, FKU Ispravitelnaya koloniya No. 1 UFSIN Rossii po Orenburgskoy oblasti

- Tomsk Region

October District Court, Tomsk

5 November 2019

11) Sergey Gennadyevich Klimov (born 26 March 1970) – 6 years + 1 year's restriction on freedom; 5-year ban on any educational activity and posting material on the internet

Criminal Code Article: 282.2, Part 1

Appeal: unsuccessful – 20 February 2020, Tomsk Regional Court

Prison address: 414044 Astrakhanskaya oblast, g. Astrakhan, ul. Sovetskoy Gvardii 50, FKU Ispravitelnaya koloniya No. 8 UFSIN Rossii po Astrakhanskoy oblasti

DETAINED AWAITING POSSIBLE DEPORTATION

- Khabarovsk Region

Blagoveshchensk City Court

19 June 2017

1) Yevgeny Lvovich Kim (born 5 October 1974) – 3 years and 9 months

Criminal Code Articles: 282.2, Part 1, and 282, Part 1
Tortured while in pre-trial detention in 2015.
Immediately on release deprived of Russian citizenship and left stateless.
Railway District Court, Khabarovsk
10 April 2019

fined under Administrative Code Article 18.8, Part 1 for failing to have documentation and ordered deported.

Foreigners' detention centre address: 680003 Khabarovskiy kray, g. Khabarovsk, ul. Repina 3, Tsentr vremennogo sodержaniya inostrannikh grazhdan

SUSPENDED SENTENCES

- Khabarovsk Region

Railway District Court, Khabarovsk
18 February 2020

1) Yevgeny Anatolyevich Aksyonov (born 19 June 1967) – 2 years, suspended + 6 months' restrictions on freedom

Criminal Code Article: 282.2, Part 2

Appeal: unsuccessful – 26 May 2020, Khabarovsk Regional Court

4 February 2020

2) Stanislav Viktorovich Kim (born 5 July 1968) – 2 years, suspended + 2 years' probation

3) Nikolay Yuryevich Polevodov (born 10 February 1970) – 2 years, suspended + 2 years' probation

Criminal Code Article: 282.2, Part 2

Appeal: pending – next hearing on 2 July 2020, Khabarovsk Regional Court

- Primorye Region

Nadezhdinsky District Court
21 January 2020

4) Grigory Gennadyevich Bubnov (born 4 September 1965) – 6 years, suspended + 5 years' probation + 5-year ban on involvement in public organisations + 1-year ban on going to public events

Criminal Code Article: 282.2, Part 1

Appeal: unsuccessful – 18 March 2020, Primorye Regional Court

- Sakha Republic (Yakutiya)

Lensk District Court
1 April 2020

5) Igor Nikolayevich Ivashin (born 16 April 1976) – 6 years, suspended + 3 and a half years' probation + 1 year's restrictions on freedom + 5-year ban on holding leadership positions in any public organisation

Criminal Code Article: Article 282.2, Part 1

Appeal: unsuccessful – 21 May 2020, Supreme Court of the Sakha Republic

- Sverdlovsk Region

Karpinsk City Court
27 January 2020

6) Darya Igoryevna Dulova (born 10 March 2000) – 1 year, suspended, with 1 year's probation

7) Venera Nikolayevna Dulova (born 3 January 1961) – 2 years, suspended, with 2 years' probation

8) Aleksandr Vitalyevich Pryanikov (born 18 May 1987) – 2 years and 6 months, suspended, with 2 years and 6 months' probation

Criminal Code Article: 282.2, Part 2

Appeal: lodged on 18 June 2020 at Sverdlovsk Regional Court

FINES

- Kamchatka Region

Vilyuchinsk City Court

14 February 2020

1) Mikhail Yuryevich Popov (born 25 May 1962) – 350,000 Roubles

2) Yelena Vyacheslavovna Popova (born 10 September 1963) – 300,000 Roubles

Criminal Code Article: 282.2, Part 1 and 282.2, Part 1.1 – but changed to Part 2 by judge at sentencing

Appeal: partially successful – conviction upheld but fines reduced from 650,000 Roubles in total to 500,000 Roubles in total

- Murmansk Region

Polyarny District Court

24 January 2020

3) Roman Nikolayevich Markin (born 18 March 1974) – 300,000 Roubles (reduced from 600,000 Roubles to account for time spent in detention)

4) Viktor Fyodorovich Trofimov (born 26 March 1957) – 350,000 Roubles (reduced from 650,000 Roubles to account for time spent in detention)

Criminal Code Article: 282.2, Part 1

Appeal: unsuccessful – 25 May 2020, Murmansk Regional Court

- Oryol Region

Oryol District Court

1 April 2019

5) Sergey Vladimirovich Skrynnikov (born 30 October 1962) – 350,000 Roubles

Criminal Code Article: 282.2, Part 2

Appeal: unsuccessful – 13 June 2019, Oryol Regional Court

- Perm Region

Ordzhonikidze District Court, Perm

14 November 2019

6) Aleksey Aleksandrovich Metsger (born 8 September 1975) – 350,000 Roubles

Criminal Code Article: 282.2, Part 2

Appeal: unsuccessful – 13 January 2020, Perm Regional Court

4 July 2019

7) Aleksandr Vasilyevich Solovyov (born 13 February 1970) – 300,000 Roubles

Criminal Code Article: 282.2, Part 2

Appeal: unsuccessful – 5 September 2019, Perm Regional Court

ASSIGNED LABOUR (prinuditelniye raboty)

- Khabarovsk Region

Railway District Court, Khabarovsk
2 September 2019

1) Valery Vasilyevich Moskalenko (born 15 April 1967) – 2 years and 2 months' assigned labour + 6 months' restrictions on freedom

Criminal Code Article: 282.2, Part 2

Appeal: partially successful (conviction upheld but punishment reduced to 500,000 Rouble fine which was waived because of time spent in detention) – 5 November 2019, Khabarovsk Regional Court

Special bimonthly FORB digest (01-16.06.2020)

16.06.20 - Ten years ago, ECHR ruled in Jehovah's Witnesses in Moscow v. Russia case.

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2020/06/12.html>

On June 10, 2010, the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) gave legal thought to a number of popular myths around Jehovah's Witnesses. The government of Russia was ordered to restore the rights of the Moscow community and compensate for the damage caused. Ten years later, Russia is acting against the decree.

[Continue reading...](#)

12.06.20 - In Astrakhan, the Court put three Jehovah's Witnesses behind bars

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2020/06/11.html>

On June 11, 2020, Natalia Senchenko and Olga Ivanova, judges of the Kirovskiy district court of Astrakhan, decided to send three believers to the detention center: Sergey Klikunov, Rustam Diarov, and Yevgeniy Ivanov. All three have families. Judge Nadezhda Melikhova put under house arrest Yevgeniy Ivanov's wife, Olga.

[Continue reading...](#)

11.06.20 - In Astrakhan, the believer Sergey Klikunov was sent to pre-trial detention

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2020/06/10.html>

On June 11, 2020, the Kirov District Court of Astrakhan, chaired by judge Olga Ivanova, ruled to imprison Sergey Klikunov, 45, for 2 months. It is still unknown what happens to the three other believers, detained during mass searches in Astrakhan on June 9.

[Continue reading...](#)

11.06.20 - Arkhangelsk synagogue assailant identified

Moscow, June 11, Interfax - The police have established the identity of the man who attacked the North Star Jewish cultural center in Arkhangelsk, a representative of the Russian Jewish Congress told *Interfax* on Thursday.

[Continue reading...](#)

10.06.20 - A provocateur's denunciation

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2020/06/9.html>

During the [raid in Kerch](#) on May 26, 2020, law enforcement officers kept the 29-year-old father of two young children, Artyom Shabliy, undressed for several hours in the cold, resulting in his illness. His 4-year-old son cut his legs on shatters from the windows broken by the law enforcers. In total 5 houses of believers were searched that day.

[Continue reading...](#)

09.06.20 - New level of severity of punishment of Jehovah's Witnesses reached

Link to full text in Russian: https://memohrc.org/ru/news_old/sud-v-pskove-prigovoril-svidetelya-iegovy-k-shesti-s-polovinoj-godam-kolonii-obshchego

Sixty-one-year-old Gennady Shpakovsky was sentenced to the longest prison term on charges of arranging the activity of an extremist organization and its financing.

On 9 June, the Pskov city court sentenced 61-year-old Jehovah's Witness Gennady Shpakovsky to six and a half years in a penal colony of general regime. This was reported to the publication 7 x 7 by attorney Arli Chimirov.

[Continue reading...](#)

09.06.20 - The 55th region of Russia is joining the religious persecution.

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2020/06/8.html>

Since the morning of June 9, 2020, believers in Astrakhan have reported on raids on their homes by law enforcement officers. It is already known about searches in at least two families. This news is being updated.

[Continue reading...](#)

09.06.20- A Moscow Court placed Sergey Oganyan, the father of a young child, under house arrest.

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2020/06/7.html>

On June 5, 2020, the Babushkinskiy District Court of Moscow refused to allow the investigator to detain Sergey Oganyan, 33, who had been detained after a [series of searches](#) in Vlasiha settlement near Moscow, and sent the believer under house arrest.

[Continue reading...](#)

09.06.20 - 61-year-old Gennadiy Shpakovskiy sentenced to a record six and a half years in prison for his faith

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2020/06/6.html>

On June 9, 2020, Judge of the Pskov City Court Galina Belik sentenced 61-year-old Pskov resident Gennadiy Shpakovskiy to six and a half years in a penal colony, despite the absence of real crimes. He was taken into custody in the courtroom. His only "crime" is to discuss the Bible with friends.

[Continue reading...](#)

05.06.20 - Crimea court increases sentence earlier handed to a Jehovah's Witness, replacing fine with six years in jail

Simferopol, June 5, Interfax - The Supreme Court of Crimea on Thursday increased the sentence of Yalta resident Artyom Gerasimov, earlier convicted in the *Jehovah's Witnesses* (organization banned in Russia) case, replacing a 400,000-ruble fine with six years in jail for him, an informed source told *Interfax*.

[Continue reading...](#)

04.06.20 - Six years in prison instead of a fine.

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2020/06/5.html>

On June 4, 2020 the Supreme Court of Crimea considered the appeal of [Artyom Gerasimov](#), who asked to be acquitted. On the contrary, the court announced a tougher punishment for his talking about God: instead of a fine of 400 thousand rubles, he was sentenced to six years in prison. The believer was taken into custody in the courtroom.

[Continue reading...](#)

03.06.20 - In Chita, Investigators study the circumstances surrounding the beating by police of a Christian teenager

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2020/06/3.html>

On 23 May 2020, 17-year-old Aleksandr Karpov was questioned by an investigator about the events of 10 February 2020. That day, during the [raid](#) on the believers, police officers dropped him on the floor, forced him to lie on his stomach and put his hands behind his head, hit him on the back, ribs and legs, causing him to bleed.

[Continue reading...](#)

Misuse of anti-extremism in May 2020

Persecution against religious organizations and believers

HRWF (17.06.2020) - <https://bit.ly/2AAyPs9>

Muslims

It became known in May 2020 that a criminal case under Article 205.5 Part 2 (participation in a terrorist organization) and Article 205.1 Part 1.1 (involving others in terrorist activities, including the activities of a terrorist organization, as well as financing of terrorism) was opened in the Chelyabinsk region against prisoner Asgat Khafizov from Tatarstan. As part of an eight-people group, Khafizov was sentenced to 19 years and two months in a maximum security penal colony under Article 205.5 Part 1 of the Criminal Code (organizing the activities of a terrorist organization) in 2017 for his involvement in the activities of the radical Islamic party Hizb ut-Tahrir. Hizb ut-Tahrir was recognized in Russia as a terrorist organization, despite the absence of information about its involvement in any terrorist activities. Therefore, we view charges under anti-terrorism articles levied against its followers merely on the grounds of their involvement in the party propaganda as inappropriate.

R. Bagautdinov, who had posted the “The Miracles of the Koran” video (banned in 2011) on his VKontakte page, was fined one thousand rubles under Article 20.29 of the Code of Administrative Offenses (dissemination of extremist materials) in early May in the town of Uchaly (Bashkortostan). We couldn’t find calls for violence, incitement to hatred, or discriminatory statements in this educational history video; in our opinion, it speaks about other religions in an emphatically respectful tone. It was banned inappropriately, and, accordingly, administrative punishment for its distribution is inappropriate as well.

The “Charity Guesthouse Ak Umut – Bright Hope” Autonomous Non-Profit Organization was added to the [Federal List of Extremist Organizations](#) on May 19 as Entry No. 76. The organization was banned by two decisions of the Kirovsky District Court of Kazan back in 2014; the ban was upheld by the Judicial Collegium for Administrative Cases of the Supreme Court of the Republic of Tatarstan in 2015. As follows from the text of the Supreme Court decision the organization’s activities were banned as extremist because prosecutorial inspection had found on its premises Islamic literature included on the Federal List of Extremist Materials. The claim, seeking to ban the materials, was filed based on the results of the most recent inspection conducted in 2014 – at the end of 12 months after the organization had received a warning about the impermissibility of extremist activity. In our opinion, three religious books discovered in the Guesthouse’s library were banned without a sufficient reason. Therefore, we believe that the organization was recognized as extremist inappropriately.

Falun Dafa

We found out in May that the Supreme Court of Khakassia has been considering a claim by the Khakassia Prosecutor’s Office to liquidate and recognize as extremist unregistered Khakassian Regional Public Organization for Spiritual and Physical Self-Improvement of a Person under the Great Falun Law “Falun Dafa.” The claim reached the court in March, but its consideration was restarted in April, after the interested parties were brought into the process. The Prosecutor’s Office seeks to ban the organization on the grounds that its members distributed Zhuan Falun – a treatise by Falun Dafa (Falun Gong) founder Li Hongzhi banned in 2011 – and did not stop this activity after a warning was issued to the organization’s leader in 2016. Falun Dafa new religious movement is built around the practice of qigong gymnastics in combination with elements of Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism. It has been banned and persecuted in China, and its followers abroad

sharply criticize the Chinese authorities. Zhuan Falun was recognized as extremist on the grounds that it allegedly advocated the superiority of the adherents of Falun Gong ideology over other people. In our opinion, propaganda of the truth of one's own convictions cannot be regarded as incitement to hatred, and the book does not contain any calls for violence, therefore the ban against it is inappropriate. Since, according to the prosecutor's office, the extremist activities of the Falun Dafa organization in Khakassia amounted only to the distribution of this book, we consider the request to ban this organization unfounded.

Jehovah's Witnesses

In May, we learned about the following law enforcement actions against Jehovah's Witnesses in various Russian regions.

- In the Krasnodar Krai, a criminal case was opened under Article 282.2 of the Criminal Code, and searches were conducted in the homes of believers from two villages, Pavlovskaya and Kholmanskaya. 62-year-old Alexander Ivshin and a 43-year-old female resident of Pavlovskaya were placed under travel restrictions and formally named as suspects under Parts 1 and 1.1 of Article 282.2 for organizing the activities of a banned community and for involvement of others in it;
- In Lesozavodsk of Primorsky Krai, Yevgeny Grinenko was placed in pre-trial detention after a series of search raids; he became a suspect under Article 282 Part 1 of the Criminal Code. The searches and interrogations in Lesozavodsk have continued;
- In the town of Maysky (Kabardino-Balkaria), searches were conducted in homes of six believers, who were interrogated as well;
- In Krasnoyarsk, a criminal case was opened against Vitaly Sukhov under Article 282.2 Part 1 of the Criminal Code;
- Searches in four houses of Jehovah's Witnesses were carried out in Kerch; a criminal case against Artyom Shabliy was opened under Article 282.2 Part 1.1 of the Criminal Code;
- In Komsomolsk-on-Amur, four people were searched, questioned and then released with no further preventive measures;
- In the town of Vyazemsky in the Khabarovsk Krai, at least seven searches were conducted in believers' homes. 68-year-old Yen Sen Li is suspected of organizing the activities of the banned organization and involving others in its activities; he was released under travel restrictions. 19-year-old Yegor Baranov has been put under arrest for two months.

Two Jehovah's Witnesses from Saratov – Felix Makhhammadiev, a native of Uzbekistan, and Konstantin Bazhenov, who had lived in Ukraine for many years and returned to Russia in 2009 – had their Russian citizenship revoked. The citizenship was revoked because both of them had been convicted under Article 282.2 of the Criminal Code. In accordance with Article 22 Part 2 of Federal Law "[On Citizenship of the Russian Federation](#)," the verdict became the basis for overturning the decision to grant them Russian citizenship.

Protestants

On May 21, the St. Petersburg City Court granted the appeal of the prosecutor's office, overturned the prior decision of the Pushkinsky District Court and recognized the books and pamphlets by American preacher William Branham (1909–1965) as extremist. Earlier, in December 2018, the Pushkin District Court refused to ban these materials. We would like to remind that Evening Light, a charitable non-governmental organization that distributed these publications, became involved in the process as an interested party. According to the experts brought in by the prosecutor's office, the author of the books

uses neuro-linguistic programming techniques, puts his teaching above the teachings of other churches, and creates an "image of an enemy" with respect to the "Catholic (including also the Orthodox) and Protestant churches." The writings in question insult the feelings "of the relevant groups of clergy and believers" by describing their opponents as sectarians and advocating the "ideas of a person's inferiority based on his/her religious affiliation." The Pushkinsky District Court ordered a new expert examination, reviewed its results and the materials of the case, and, after hearing the opinion of the process participants, decided to deny the prosecutorial request. The prosecutor's office did not agree with the decision of the Pushkinsky District Court and appealed to the city court, which ordered a new expert examination in the case and, based on its results, recognized Branham's works as extremist. In our opinion, there are no grounds for banning Branham's texts, since statements about the truth of one creed and the fallacy of all others are typical of any religious teaching and should not be prosecuted.

6.5 years' jail for building "world theocratic state" with 700 roubles

A Pskov court handed a six and a half year jail term to 61-year-old Jehovah's Witness Gennady Shpakovsky. This is the second-longest jail term yet on "extremism"-related charges for meeting with others to pray and study beliefs. Muslim Ilgar Aliyev received an eight-year prison term in 2018. Prosecutors claimed two jars of small donations Shpakovsky had were to finance building a "world theocratic state".

By Victoria Arnold

Forum 18 (16.06.2020) - <https://bit.ly/31xaKNr> - On 9 June, a court in Pskov in northern European Russia handed 61-year-old Gennady Shpakovsky the longest jail sentence given to a Jehovah's Witness after the 2017 Supreme Court ban on Jehovah's Witness activity - six and a half years' imprisonment in a general-regime labour camp ("correctional colony"). This is the second-longest jail term yet handed down on "extremism"-related charges for meeting with others to pray and study beliefs.

Shpakovsky, from Pskov, will have to serve the full term, should his appeal be unsuccessful, as he has spent no time in pre-trial detention (see below).

After his release, Shpakovsky will also undergo another year of restrictions on freedom, his lawyer explained to Forum 18. These comprise an 11 pm to 6 am curfew, a ban on leaving his home town, and requirements to present himself to probation authorities twice a month and inform them if he wishes to move house. He will also be barred from leading or participating in any exercise of freedom of religion and belief for three years (see below).

Prisoner of conscience Shpakovsky's six-and-a-half-year sentence is the second-longest sentence imposed for meeting with others to pray and study beliefs. Ilgar Vagif-ogly Aliyev, who met with other Muslims to study Islam and theologian Said Nursi's texts, was jailed in June 2018 in Izberbash for eight years. Aliyev, however, spent a year and three months in detention, meaning that he is due to be released after about six years and 1.5 months, in September 2024.

Shpakovsky is also the first Jehovah's Witness to be convicted of "Financing extremist activity" under Criminal Code Article 282.3, Part 1. "In the flat where there was a search,

the FSB found two jars, one containing 200 Roubles, the other 500 Roubles," his lawyer Arly Chimirov told Forum 18. "The jars were labelled 'salt' and 'sugar', [and] they considered this to be conspiracy and financing" (see below).

In court, the FSB security service claimed that the Jehovah's Witnesses were building a "world theocratic state" (see below).

500 Roubles is equivalent to about 68 Norwegian Kroner, 6 Euros, or 6 Dollars.

According to the written verdict of 9 June 2020, seen by Forum 18, Shpakovsky "took actions of an organised nature, aimed at continuing the illegal activity of the court-prohibited religious organisation of Jehovah's Witnesses of Pskov, in the form of convening meetings, organising religious sermons and services at these meetings, distributing extremist literature, collecting financial resources in the form of donations, [and] implementing preaching activity, agreeing and coordinating his activities under direction from a superior organisation in the structure of the worldwide organisation of Jehovah's Witnesses on the territory of the Russian Federation – the Administrative Centre of Jehovah's Witnesses".

"Gennady was morally prepared for such a sentence," Chimirov told Forum 18 on 11 June. "We will certainly appeal." Shpakovsky himself lodged an initial appeal on 15 June, according to the City Court website. His lawyer will file further materials soon, and the appeal hearing will take place at Pskov Regional Court.

"In short, this was not a surprise, judging by what he was charged with," Shpakovsky's wife Tatyana Shpakovskaya told Forum 18 from Pskov. "It was especially painful when my husband gave me his wedding ring when he was handcuffed like a dangerous criminal, although before that the prosecutor and the FSB investigator had shaken hands with him when they arrived in the courtroom."

Shpakovskaya added: "There was a feeling that we would not see each other again. Of course, my husband also felt the same. We are used to having the whole family together and solving all problems together, and now he knows that we are left without his spiritual, physical and material support" (see below).

In his final speech to the court, Shpakovsky described the effects of his prosecution: "From the time I found myself in the position of 'extremist', my family and I have experienced a constant sense of discouragement and confusion, which includes loss of sleep and disruption of a normal lifestyle. We feel people looking askance at us and hear the words: 'Look, the extremist is coming!' or 'I have nothing to talk about with the extremist!'"

Shpakovsky added that the family had felt "a constant sense of concern and anxiety" in the two years since his arrest on 3 June 2018 (see below).

UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention

"Court decisions are getting harsher," Jehovah's Witness spokesman Yaroslav Sivulsky commented on 9 June. "From the point of view of international law, the verdict is an arbitrary deprivation of liberty for the peaceful practice of religion."

Jehovah's Witnesses state that Shpakovsky's conviction and jailing are "in defiance of repeated demands by the United Nations (UN) Working Group on Arbitrary Detention and other prominent international actors to stop arresting, detaining, and prosecuting Jehovah's Witnesses for their peaceful worship".

Shpakovsky's conviction is the first since the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention adopted a wide-ranging Opinion (A/HRC/WGAD/2020/10) on 1 May condemning the raids, arrests, detention and trials of 18 Jehovah's Witnesses, stating it "wishes to emphasize that none of them should have been arrested and held in pre-trial detention and no trial of any of them should take or should have taken place".

The Working Group also noted that the 18 "are part of now ever-growing number of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia who have been arrested, detained and charged with criminal activity on the basis of mere exercise of freedom of religion, a right protected by article 18 of the Covenant" (see below and forthcoming F18News article).

On 2 June, Forum 18 wrote to the Russian Justice Ministry, the Russian Permanent Representative to the United Nations in Geneva, and the Federal Ombudsperson for Human Rights to ask how and when the Russian authorities intend to fulfil the Working Group's requirements.

The Justice Ministry's press office directed Forum 18 to put these questions to the Federal Investigative Committee and the General Prosecutor's Office, which Forum 18 did in writing on 3 June. Forum 18 received no other response by the middle of the working day in Moscow on 16 June.

At a court hearing on 28 May 2020, Shpakovsky requested that his case be closed in light of the UN Working Group's Opinion, but Judge Galina Belik refused this, as she did not deem it to be sufficient grounds.

On 9 June Forum 18 asked Pskov City Court why the judge did not take the UN Working Group's Opinion into account, but has received no response.

Prosecuted for meeting to pray

Prosecutions of Jehovah's Witnesses are happening despite the Supreme Court judges' noting in both their initial and appeal rulings that the Court "does not give an evaluation of the beliefs of Jehovah's Witnesses".

A 23 March 2018 submission to the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) in Strasbourg (seen by Forum 18) from Andrey Fyodorov, the Russian government representative to the Court, stated in Paragraph 91 that the ban "does not contain a restriction or prohibition on individual profession of [Jehovah's Witness] teaching". This was in relation to ECtHR application number 10188/17.

Jehovah's Witnesses therefore argue that the Supreme Court's 2017 ban applies to the activities of legal entities, not to the activities of individual believers. As prisoner of conscience Shpakovsky told Radio Free Europe's Sever.Realii website on 9 June before his sentence: "Jehovah's Witness groups held their gatherings long before the appearance of a legal entity. The legal entity created later solved organisational issues (the renting of premises, etc.), but it did not lead meetings to read the Bible and conversations about God."

In his final speech to the court, Shpakovsky stated: "As this [Supreme Court] decision exclusively concerned a legal entity, I decided that, as a citizen of the Russian Federation, I have the right to use Article 28 of the Constitution of the Russian Federation, which guarantees the right to freely practise any religion, including the Jehovah's Witness religion, both individually and together with others."

Shpakovsky added that "I have been affirmed in this understanding even more" after the Russian government's March 2018 submission to the ECtHR, in particular Paragraph 91, which he read out to the Pskov court.

Shpakovsky continued: "Your honour, how should I, an ordinary citizen of the Russian Federation, who does not have a special legal education, have understood the essence of the decision of the Supreme Court?"

The written verdict in Shpakovsky's case describes his leadership of "collective religious services", consisting of "the singing of songs from a special collection of Jehovah's Witness religious teachings, prayers to the God Jehovah, [and] the study of articles of religious content under his direction".

The judge decided that the defence argument that the Supreme Court ban applied only to the activities of the registered religious organisation and not to those of a religious group was "based on an incorrect interpretation of this decision and the legal norms analysed therein", and that the liquidation of and ban on activities of "structural subdivisions" should be understood as a ban on all forms of association of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia.

Prisoners of conscience

Like Muslims who meet to read Nursi's works, Jehovah's Witnesses face prosecution under Criminal Code Article 282.2 ("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").

Unlike Muslims who meet to read Nursi's works, some Jehovah's Witnesses - like prisoner of conscience Shpakovsky - are also being prosecuted under Criminal Code Article 282.3 ("Financing of extremist activity"). Offences under this article also incur large fines or prison terms of up to eight years.

In addition to prisoner of conscience Shpakovsky, seven other Jehovah's Witnesses - from Saratov and Oryol - are currently jailed for their exercise of freedom of religion and belief.

Some of the Jehovah's Witnesses have been tortured.

Two Muslim men who met with other Muslims to read Nursi's works are currently known to be serving jail sentences:

- Artur Abdulgamidovich Kaltuyev, who sentenced to three years in November 2017;
- and Ilgar Vagif-ogly Aliyev, sentenced to eight years in June 2018.

In addition, Muslim Yevgeny Lvovich Kim is still in custody despite his release after a three years and nine months' sentence handed down in June 2017. On his release on 10 April 2019, in what was the first such case, he was deprived of his Russian citizenship, left stateless, fined, and ordered deported to Uzbekistan. This is his country of birth (although he is not a citizen of the country) and is itself a serious violator of freedom of religion and belief.

Prisoner of conscience Kim remains in a temporary detention centre for foreign nationals in Khabarovsk, awaiting deportation to Uzbekistan.

All remain on the Federal Financial Monitoring Service (Rosfinmonitoring) "List of Terrorists and Extremists", whose assets banks are obliged to freeze (although small transactions are permitted).

Continuing trials and investigations

Ninety-three Jehovah's Witnesses were known to be defendants in 43 trials as of 21 May.

In late March, police raided 20 Muslim women's homes in Naberezhnyye Chelny in Tatarstan. One woman suffered a heart attack and was placed in intensive care. A court ordered two months' house arrest for 62-year-old Nakiya Sharifullina as she is investigated on criminal "extremism" charges for meeting to study theologian Nursi's works. A Dagestan court ordered two months' pre-trial detention for Ibragim Murtazaliyev as he is investigated on similar charges.

Pskov: FSB surveillance, charges

The Pskov Region branch of the FSB security service opened its criminal case against Gennady Valerianovich Shpakovsky (born 6 October 1958) on 31 May 2018. According to federal tax records, he had earlier chaired Pskov's local registered Jehovah's Witness organisation.

It became apparent during court hearings that officers had kept Shpakovsky and fellow Jehovah's Witnesses under surveillance for several months, covertly recording and filming them as they met to pray and read the Bible together, and monitoring their computers.

On 9 June, the local Vesti-Pskov news programme on the Rossiya-1 state TV channel showed clips of surveillance footage of Shpakovsky and another man standing at a computer, then Shpakovsky writing on a piece of paper. It also briefly scrolled through the receipts used as evidence of the charge of "Financing extremist activity", which the report claimed were found on Shpakovsky's computer and detailed the collection of funds for building Kingdom Halls and the expenses of the local congregation.

On 3 June 2018, the FSB security service and OMON riot police carried out five armed raids in Pskov, including on the home of an 80-year-old woman. Officers arrested Shpakovsky in a friend's flat, "where they were peacefully discussing the Bible", Jehovah's Witnesses stated on 9 June 2018. After breaking down the door and searching the property for six hours, they took him and two others away for questioning, which lasted until late at night. After interrogation, officers released the three.

Investigators had Shpakovsky added to the Federal Financial Monitoring Service (Rosfinmonitoring) "List of Terrorists and Extremists" on 6 July 2018. This meant that the bank card Shpakovsky used to access his salary and pension was "immediately blocked", his wife Tatyana told Forum 18 on 11 June, meaning he could no longer use the card or make or receive transfers.

Multiple charges on instructions from Moscow

The FSB security service formally charged Shpakovsky under 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") on 19 March 2019, and under Criminal Code Article 282.3 ("Financing of extremist activity") on 21 August 2019.

Investigators had not originally intended to prosecute Shpakovsky under both Criminal Code Articles, lawyer Arly Chimirov told Forum 18 on 11 June 2020, "but when they had already prepared the case for submission to court, the investigator was instructed to increase Shpakovsky's charges with this article. This is happening a lot now." He added that "since this began happening simultaneously across several regions, it is logical that [the instruction] came from Moscow".

According to the written verdict, "In the period 18 August 2017 to 3 June 2018, Shpakovsky's duties as director of the Pskov local Jehovah's Witness religious organisation included: the collection of monetary resources designated for the activities of the extremist organisation, and also the accounting, storage, and disbursement of funds, [and] the preparation of financial statements for the Administrative Centre of Jehovah's Witnesses". It added that the community collected a total of 180,957 Roubles between 31 August 2017 and 3 June 2018.

According to Chimirov, the Criminal Code Article 282.3, Part 1 charge was based on ordinary donations from members of the community. "In the flat where there was a search, the FSB found two jars, one containing 200 Roubles, the other 500 Roubles," he told Forum 18. "The jars were labelled 'salt' and 'sugar', [and] they considered this to be conspiracy and financing. Plus, Shpakovsky had receipts [showing] how much and when believers had made donations and how they had been spent (helping others, household necessities, and similar), [and] they deemed this to be the financing of extremist activity".

500 Roubles is equivalent to about 68 Norwegian Kroner, 6 Euros, or 6 Dollars.

Shpakovsky himself commented to Sever.Realii on 9 June 2020 that he thought he was charged under the second Criminal Code article to "punish [him] as much as possible". What the FSB called "financing", he said, was the voluntary contributions of believers which were sent to "brothers and sisters".

Prosecutors lodged the case at Pskov City Court on 26 September 2019, according to the court website. The court scheduled seventeen hearings to take place, beginning on 5 November 2019, including the delivery of the verdict on 9 June 2020; two hearings in the spring of 2020 appear to have been postponed because of Covid-19 restrictions, and another took place on 1 June with no observers allowed inside the courtroom except Shpakovsky's daughter Mariya.

Asked by Sever.Realii on 9 June 2020 why he had not left the country when prosecutions of Jehovah's Witnesses began, Shpakovsky responded: "I consider myself innocent. Why should I leave the country in which I grew up, in which my family and friends live? I did not commit any crime against people, nor against the government, nor against the state and the existing system. The indictment does not contain any damage or injuries. I am being persecuted for my faith."

Building a "world theocratic state"?

"We believe that correction is possible only in conditions of real isolation from society by imposing the main punishment in the form of imprisonment," Pskov's senior assistant prosecutor Oleg Tsyplakov told the court, according to Sever.Realii on 9 June.

In court, the FSB security service claimed that Jehovah's Witnesses were building a "world theocratic state". Prosecutors noted that the Pskov community was recorded discussing the parable of the sheep and the goats, in which it is said that people will be divided at the Last Judgment into those who will receive "eternal torment", and the righteous who will receive "eternal life".

"We are simply retelling the parable of the sheep and goats that was cited by Jesus Christ," Shpakovsky commented to Sever.Realii. "And only he will have the right to determine, ultimately, who is the sheep and who is the goat."

According to the written verdict, prosecution witness Ivan Kalyta, an FSB security service officer, told the court that the aim of the FSB surveillance operation was to document the fact that the organisation was continuing its activities, not to uncover "extremist" activity. Hymn singing, prayer, discussion of preaching skills, and the collection of donations were taken as evidence of continuing activities.

It appears, therefore, that, after the ban, Jehovah's Witnesses do not have to engage in any activity which is itself considered "extremist" in order to be charged with allegedly "extremism"-related offences. The verdict indicates that charges may be brought if they do anything which was previously part of the activities of a now-prohibited organisation.

Shpakovsky's defence argued that the indictment did not indicate any actions of his which had an "extremist" character, nor any motive for the alleged offences. Judge Belik dismissed this as being "without validity", noting that the wish to continue the activities of the banned "extremist" organisation was his motive.

After the final hearing, Oleg Tsyplakov, Pskov's senior assistant prosecutor, told Vesti-Pskov that "the arguments of the defence about the law-abiding behaviour of the defendant were recognised by the court as invalid."

Forum 18 wrote to the Pskov Regional Prosecutor's Office on 9 June to ask why it had sought a jail sentence, in what way Shpakovsky could be considered dangerous, and why meeting for prayer and Bible reading were considered criminal offences. No reply has been received.

Pskov conviction

On 9 June 2020, Judge Belik of Pskov City Court found Shpakovsky guilty under 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") and Criminal Code Article 282.3, Part 1 ("Financing extremist activity").

According to the written verdict, the judge found no aggravating circumstances to Shpakovsky's alleged offences, took into account his age and the positive character reference from his workplace as mitigating factors, and ruled that he should be given a minimal custodial term. She decided against a lighter sentence, as this would not "fulfil the objective of preventing the commission of new crimes".

Shpakovsky received six years under Article 282.2, Part 1 (the minimum custodial sentence stipulated by the Criminal Code) and three years under Article 282.3, Part 1 (also the minimum), to run almost concurrently to make a total of six and a half years in a general-regime labour camp ("correctional colony"). He was taken into custody directly from the courtroom.

Judge Belik ruled that the cash seized in the FSB raids should go to the state and Shpakovsky's computer and 17 copies of the New World Bible should be destroyed.

That evening, the local Vesti-Pskov news programme showed footage of police officers putting handcuffs on Shpakovsky (who had arrived at court with a bag already packed for prison) and leading him away.

"It was especially painful when my husband gave me his wedding ring when he was handcuffed like a dangerous criminal, although before that the prosecutor and the FSB investigator had shaken hands with him when they arrived in the courtroom," Shpakovsky's wife Tatyana Shpakovskaya told Forum 18 from Pskov on 11 June.

"There was a feeling that we would not see each other again," she added. "Of course, my husband also felt the same. We are used to having the whole family together and solving all problems together, and now he knows that we are left without his spiritual, physical, and material support."

Given Shpakovsky's double charge, he could have been imprisoned for up to 15 years. Prosecutors requested a sentence of seven and half years' imprisonment. In addition to imprisonment, Shpakovsky will be subject to another year of restrictions on freedom after his release, his lawyer explained to Forum 18 on 15 June. These include an 11pm-6am curfew, a ban on leaving his home town, and requirements to present himself to probation authorities twice a month and inform them if he wishes to move house. He will also be barred from leading or participating in any exercise of freedom of religion and belief for three years.

Because he spent the duration of the investigation and trial under travel restrictions, rather than in detention or under house arrest, if Shpakovsky's planned appeal is unsuccessful, he will have to serve his full six and half year sentence (although the time he will now spend in detention before his appeal will be deducted at the rate of one day to one and a half days).

On 9 June Forum 18 asked Pskov City Court why Judge Belik had imposed such a long sentence, but has received no response.

This is the first time that a Jehovah's Witness has been convicted of "financing extremist activity" or under multiple articles of the Criminal Code. Many others, however, are currently on trial or under investigation under various combinations of Criminal Code Articles.

Verdict "was especially painful"

"In short, this was not a surprise, judging by what he was charged with," Shpakovsky's wife Tatyana Shpakovskaya told Forum 18. "We grasped the fact that if the sentence were milder than the prosecutor requested, then it would not be by much. And so it turned out. Of course, my natural reaction, which I think any normal person would have, is pain at the fact that they are splitting up a family that has been together for 30 years."

In his final speech to the court, Shpakovsky described the effects of his prosecution: "From the time I found myself in the position of 'extremist', my family and I have experienced a constant sense of discouragement and confusion, which includes loss of sleep and disruption of a normal lifestyle. We feel people looking askance at us and hear the words: 'Look, the extremist is coming!' or 'I have nothing to talk about with the extremist!'"

Shpakovsky added that the family felt a "constant sense of concern and anxiety" in the two years since the raid and arrests on 3 June 2018, fearing that they could happen again.

According to Sever.Realii, police filmed Jehovah's Witnesses who had gathered outside the court to await the verdict. Interviewed by a Pskov-Vesti reporter, they denied that they were a "sect" (as "experts" for the prosecution had described them) and noted the

ongoing violations of their freedom of religion and belief: "I was born into a family of Jehovah's Witnesses. My parents were exiled to Siberia, and I was born in exile," said one. Another added: "Any decision the court might make will still glorify our God whom we worship."

Shpakovsky is currently being held in Pskov's Investigation Prison (SIZO) No. 1 while his appeal is pending. According to his wife, no visits or phone calls are possible because of restrictions relating to the coronavirus pandemic, but the family is writing letters.

Shpakovsky's current prison address is:

180000 Pskovskaya Oblast
g. Pskov
ulitsa Nekrasova, 39
FKU SIZO-1

More criminal cases in Pskov Region

Criminal cases are underway in Pskov Region against two other Jehovah's Witnesses, both from the town of Porkhov. Both cases were opened on 28 March 2019 and are also being investigated by the FSB security service:

- Sergey Vasilyevich Komissarov (born 5 October 1966) is still a suspect under 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");

- Aleksey Nikolayevich Khabarov (born 15 February 1975) has been charged under Article 282.2, Part 2 ("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").

Why a 2010 ECHR ruling, Jehovah's Witnesses in Moscow v. Russia, is relevant now

JW World Headquarters (13.06.2020) - Ten years ago, on June 10, 2010, the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) ruled that Russian authorities had perpetrated a grave violation of human rights with a years-long campaign to suppress the freedom of worship for Jehovah's Witnesses. The [ECHR's judgment](#) directed Russia to pay a sizable fine and to reinstate the registration of the Local Religious Organization of Jehovah's Witnesses in Moscow—which the authorities revoked in 2004.

Is this relevant now?

Yes. The ECHR's 2010 judgment categorically refuted the baseless charges that Russia continues to level against peaceful believers today in an effort to label them "extremists." Thus, the ECHR's objective findings are an authoritative voice that exposes and counters the propaganda Russia has launched against Jehovah's Witnesses.

What lies did the ECHR expose?

- *Coercion into destroying families*—§109-114 (see link above to judgment)

- *Door-to-door preaching invaded privacy of others—§122*
- *Infringement of parental rights of non-Witness parents—§123-127*
- *Proselytizing, "mind control," and totalitarian discipline—§128-130*
- *Encouragement of suicide or refusal of medical assistance—§131-141*
- *Damage to citizens' health—§143-146*
- *Luring minors into organization—§147, 148*
- *Incitement of citizens to refuse civic duties—§149-153*

In summary, the ECHR concluded that the Moscow Justice Department, along with the Moscow courts, had no evidence to support their claims and "no legal basis" for refusing the reregistration of Jehovah's Witnesses. The Court decried the Moscow authorities, asserting that they "did not act in good faith and neglected their duty of neutrality and impartiality." Additionally, the Court deemed the Moscow authorities guilty of violating the European Convention on Human Rights, to which Russia is a State Party.—§181, 182.

Who is behind Russia's lies?

Beginning in 1995, the Committee for the Salvation of Youth from Totalitarian Cults (aka the Salvation Committee), an NGO affiliated with the Russian Orthodox Church, persisted in trying to ban Jehovah's Witnesses in Moscow. In the following years, the Salvation Committee made five attempts at launching a criminal case against the Witnesses but all were terminated.. However, in April 1998, a new investigator recommended that the Salvation Committee lodge [a civil action against the Witnesses](#). This tactic was successful.—§16-22.

In recent years, the Russian member association of the anti-sect umbrella organization [FECRIS](#) (European Federation of Centres of Research and Information on Sectarianism) has been a major actor in a general plan aiming to reintegrate so-called lost sheep into the Orthodox Church. [Financed by the ROC](#), the FECRIS member association in Russia actively targets Jehovah's Witnesses and other minority religions.

Russian law and anti-extremism rhetoric aid the ROC...

In [1997, Russia passed legislation](#) that excluded the Witnesses from a list of "traditional" religions recognized in Russia. The following year, the Salvation Committee's case against the Witnesses opened under the auspices of that 1997 law, led to the effective [banning of the community in Moscow in 2004](#).

Russia's Federal Law "On Combating Extremist Activity" (No. 114-FZ), adopted in 2002, was amended in 2006, 2007, and 2008 so that it extends "far beyond any fears of extremism linked to terrorism," according to the article ["Russia's Extremism Law Violates Human Rights," published in The Moscow Times](#).

The law "simply seizes upon the 'terrorist' vocabulary that has become commonplace internationally since the 9/11 assault on the Twin Towers in NYC, and uses it to describe unwelcome religious groups across Russia," explains Derek H. Davis, former director of the J.M. Dawson Institute of Church-State Studies at Baylor University. Hence, "the 'extreme' label," says Mr. Davis, "has been unfairly and disproportionately used against Jehovah's Witnesses."

In its 2010 judgment, the ECHR found the Witnesses "not liable for extremist activity." (§55) "I agree with the ECHR's finding," [stated former UN Special Rapporteur, Heiner Bielefeldt](#). "Banning Jehovah's Witnesses' right to organize themselves according to their religion was 'drastic' and 'disproportionate,' and violated freedom of religion."

"A miscarriage of justice"

On June 9, 2020, Human Rights Watch's [Rachel Denber](#) described the conviction of Gennady Shpakoskiy, one of Jehovah's Witnesses, as "a miscarriage of justice." She called on Russia to free Shpakovskiy and the other 30 imprisoned Witnesses. She added: "Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia should be allowed to worship on an equal basis with everyone else, without fear of being arrested or harassed."

Below are the latest statistics for Russia's persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses throughout the Federation and Crimea:

- 346 under criminal investigation
- 31 in prison (8 convicted; 23 pretrial detention; 170 have served time in pretrial detention)
- 23 under house arrest
- 946 homes raided since 2017 Supreme Court ruling (145 raided in 2020—even during the COVID-19 pandemic)

CRIMEA: Third jailing as second Jehovah's Witness jailed

By Felix Corley

Forum 18 (10.06.2020) - <https://bit.ly/2zCvg46> - In the third jailing in Russian-occupied Crimea on "extremism" charges to punish the exercise of freedom of religion and belief, Jehovah's Witness Artyom Gerasimov was jailed for six years after a prosecutor appealed against an earlier fine. Jailed earlier were Muslim Renat Suleimanov for four years and Jehovah's Witness Sergei Filatov for six years. Like Suleimanov and Filatov, Gerasimov expects to be sent to a prison in Russia.

For the third time, a court in Russian-occupied Crimea has jailed an individual on "extremism" charges to punish the exercise of freedom of religion or belief. After an appeal by the prosecutor, on 4 June Crimea's Supreme Court changed the punishment imposed on 35-year-old Artyom Gerasimov from a fine of two years' average wages to a six-year jail term. He was arrested in the courtroom. He was the second Crimean Jehovah's Witness to be jailed.

The decision to make prisoner of conscience Gerasimov's punishment harsher without sending the case for a retrial is the first such instance in any Jehovah's Witness case in Crimea, or in Russia within its internationally recognised borders.

The first such jailing for exercising freedom of religion and belief was Muslim prisoner of conscience Renat Suleimanov. In January 2019 a Simferopol court [jailed him for four years on "extremism"-related charges for meeting openly in mosques with three friends to discuss their faith](#).

In May 2019, the prison authorities [transferred prisoner of conscience Suleimanov to a labour camp in Russia's Kabardino-Balkariya Region](#). He has complained to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg, arguing that the transfer to another state was illegal. In January 2020, he completed [six months in a punishment cell for an alleged conflict with another prisoner which his lawyer insists was fabricated](#).

The second such jailing in Crimea was of Jehovah's Witness Sergei Filatov. On 5 March he was jailed for meeting with family and friends to discuss religious themes. On 26 May he

failed to overturn his six-year prison term and other post-jail restrictions on appeal at Crimea's Supreme Court (see below).

Prison authorities began the transfer of prisoner of conscience Filatov to a prison camp in Russia on 8 June, two days after his 48th birthday. As Gerasimov's sentence has now also come into force he, like his fellow prisoners of conscience Filatov and Suleimanov, is likely to be sent to serve his sentence in Russia (see below).

The Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War [covers the rights of civilians in territories occupied by another state \(described as "protected persons"\)](#). Article 76 includes the provision: "Protected persons accused of offences shall be detained in the occupied country, and if convicted they shall serve their sentences therein."

Russia's March 2014 annexation of Crimea is not recognised by Ukraine or internationally.

Criminal convictions and jailings or fines of Jehovah's Witnesses within Russia's internationally recognised borders [are widespread](#). On 9 June 2020, a Pskov court jailed Gennady Shpakovsky for six and a half years, the longest jail term so far on a Jehovah's Witness (see forthcoming F18News article).

Within the annexed territory of Crimea, the imposition of a jail term on Gerasimov came as another Jehovah's Witness, 53-year-old Viktor Stashevsky, is on trial in the port city of Sevastopol facing "extremism"-related charges. He too faces a possible long prison term if convicted (see below).

Like Filatov, Gerasimov and Suleimanov, Stashevsky faces charges under Russian Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 1. This punishes "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". The maximum punishment is 10 years' imprisonment.

In the early morning of 26 May, separate groups of up to 10 armed police and OMON riot police officers in masks raided five homes in the eastern Crimean city of Kerch. They interrogated at least seven people – including several elderly people – accusing them of being Jehovah's Witnesses. Investigators opened a criminal case against 29-year-old Artyom Shably an hour before the early morning raid (see below).

"Extremist" organisations banned

Russia's Supreme Court [banned the Muslim missionary movement Tabligh Jamaat as "extremist" in 2009](#). The Russian ban was imposed in Crimea after Russia annexed the peninsula from Ukraine in March 2014. The charges against prisoner of conscience Suleimanov related to membership of Tabligh Jamaat.

Russia's Supreme Court [banned Jehovah's Witnesses as "extremist" in 2017](#). More than 350 Russian Jehovah's Witnesses have been convicted, are on trial or are being investigated on "extremism"-related criminal charges, of whom more than 20 are in pre-trial detention.

Following Russia's March 2014 occupation of Crimea, the Russian authorities granted re-registration to [all 22 Jehovah's Witness communities in Crimea. But in 2017 they were banned following the Russian Supreme Court ban](#).

Gerasimov: Minimum fine turned into six year jail term

On 5 March, Yalta City Court convicted Crimean Jehovah's Witness, Artyom Vyacheslavovich Gerasimov (born 13 January 1985), on "extremism"-related criminal charges, "merely for meeting with others to discuss the Bible".

Prosecutor Oksana Chuchuyeva had [asked for a jail term of six and a half years, plus one year of restrictions on freedom and a three-year ban on unspecified activities. Judge Vladimir Romanenko fined Gerasimov 400,000 Roubles, the minimum fine under Russian Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 1 equivalent to two years' average wages. No other punishment appears to have been imposed.](#)

In court, Gerasimov insisted on his innocence, arguing that he had not been involved in any activities of the local Jehovah's Witness organisation after its liquidation in 2017.

Both Gerasimov and the Prosecutor's Office appealed against the punishment to Crimea's Supreme Court in Simferopol. Gerasimov sought the overturning of his conviction as he does not consider himself guilty of any crime. Prosecutor Chuchuyeva appealed "because of the mildness of the verdict" and repeated her demand for a six-and-a-half-year jail term.

The first hearing was due on 19 May. It was then rescheduled for 4 June. Gerasimov was originally assigned a court-nominated lawyer. He rejected the lawyer's services and chose to defend himself at the appeal hearing.

Gerasimov's supporters came to the Supreme Court in Simferopol for the 4 June hearing, but court officials did not let them in, the Crimean Human Rights Group noted the same day.

On 4 June, Judge Aleksei Posledov rejected Gerasimov's appeal, but almost completely accepted Prosecutor Chuchuyeva's appeal for a six-and-a-half-year jail term. The Judge changed Gerasimov's punishment from a fine to a prison term of six years. As the sentence then came into force, officers arrested him in the court room and took him away to begin serving his sentence.

As prisoner of conscience Gerasimov did not spend time in pre-trial detention or under house arrest, he will be required to spend the full six years in prison. His release is therefore due in June 2026.

Yalta Prosecutor's Office refused to put Forum 18 through to Prosecutor Chuchuyeva or to the head of the Office Maksim Yudin on 5 June.

Gerasimov is planning to appeal further, Jehovah's Witnesses told Forum 18. Any further appeal would be heard at the 4th Cassational Court, which is based in the Russian city of Krasnodar.

Now his sentence has come into force, Gerasimov is likely to be sent to serve his sentence in Russia. At the moment he is being held at Simferopol's Investigation Prison.

Filatov: Crimea's Supreme Court rejects appeal against six year jail term

The first Crimean Jehovah's Witness jailed for exercising freedom of religion or belief, Sergei Viktorovich Filatov (born 6 June 1972) who is from the town of Dzhankoi, failed to overturn his six-year prison term and other post-jail restrictions on appeal at Crimea's Supreme Court on 26 May, according to court records. The Prosecutor was Sergei Novoselchuk.

Prisoner of conscience Filatov had been [accused of continuing the activities of the banned](#)

[local Jehovah's Witness community. The FSB security service secretly bugged his home and claimed that a 10 October 2017 gathering in his home with family and friends where they discussed the Bible was evidence of this.](#)

Filatov was [convicted at Dzhankoi District Court on 5 March 2020 under Russian Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 1 \("Organisation of the activity of a social or religious association or other organisation in relation to which a court has adopted a decision legally in force on liquidation or ban on the activity in connection with the carrying out of extremist activity"\).](#)

The Judge [handed Filatov not only the six-year prison term, but a post-prison five-year ban on engaging in educational activity, "activities relating to speeches and publications in mass media", and posting information on the internet, and one year of unspecified restrictions on freedom.](#)

Because of the coronavirus pandemic, Filatov was not brought from Simferopol's Investigation Prison to the Supreme Court for the appeal hearing, which took place by video. The Court did not allow his family or friends to attend the two-hour hearing, the Crimean Process human rights group noted.

Filatov's defence argued at the Supreme Court appeal that the case was full of "inconsistencies and falsifications". The defence complained that "the investigation illegally changed the evidence in the case, involved false witnesses and experts who did not provide diplomas confirming their competence". However, the Judges rejected the defence arguments and refused to hear testimony from witnesses the defence wished to put forward.

The Supreme Court also refused to take into account the United Nations (UN) Working Group on Arbitrary Detention Opinion, adopted on 1 May, [condemning the raids, arrests, detention and trials of 18 Jehovah's Witnesses on similar charges within Russia's internationally recognised boundaries.](#)

Filatov's sentence came into force at the appeal hearing on 26 May when the presiding Judge Eduard Belousov had finished reading the verdict. As Filatov spent from 5 March in Investigation Prison after the verdict was handed down, he is due for release on 23 January 2026, Jehovah's Witnesses calculate.

Forum 18 was unable to reach Prosecutor Novoselchuk either at Crimea's Prosecutor's Office or at his office at the Supreme Court where he generally works.

Filatov is planning to appeal further, his lawyer Oleg Zakharchuk told Radio Free Europe's Krym.Realii after the Supreme Court verdict was handed down. Any further appeal would be heard at the 4th Cassational Court, which is based in the Russian city of Krasnodar.

In January 2019, Filatov was added to the Russian Federal Financial Monitoring Service (Rosfinmonitoring) "List of Terrorists and Extremists", whose assets banks are obliged to freeze (although small transactions are permitted). Filatov told Forum 18 that as he does not have a bank account the authorities could not freeze it.

At 7 am on 8 June, prison authorities began the transfer of Filatov from Simferopol's Investigation Prison to Russia's Krasnodar Region, Jehovah's Witnesses said. The authorities have not said in which labour camp he will serve his sentence.

Stashevsky: Another trial, another possible long sentence

Another Crimean Jehovah's Witness, Viktor Vladimirovich Stashevsky (born 11 July 1966), is on trial in the port city of Sevastopol facing "extremism"-related charges. He too faces a possible long prison term if convicted.

The FSB security service [launched a criminal case against Stashevsky on 31 May 2019 under Russian Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 1 \("Organisation of the activity of a social or religious association or other organisation in relation to which a court has adopted a decision legally in force on liquidation or ban on the activity in connection with the carrying out of extremist activity"\)](#).

The FSB claimed that Stashevsky had "continued the activity and propagated the ideas of Jehovah's Witnesses, conducted meetings, and held religious talks".

On 4 June 2019, without showing any warrants, the FSB [raided nine homes in Sevastopol, including that of a 91-year-old woman. Officers threatened to plant drugs in the homes, Jehovah's Witnesses stated](#).

After being held overnight in a detention centre, the investigator allowed Stashevsky to be freed under a pledge not to leave the city.

On 11 July 2019, the investigator had Stashevsky added to the Russian Federal Financial Monitoring Service (Rosfinmonitoring) "List of Terrorists and Extremists", whose assets banks are obliged to freeze (although small transactions are permitted).

FSB Investigator F. Rybalka [completed the criminal case on 21 February 2020](#). He described Stashevsky as "the ideological inspirer of the extremist organisation, using his authority, well-developed strong-willed qualities and organisational abilities, as well as special knowledge and propaganda skills he had previously acquired".

Investigator Rybalka claimed that Stashevsky "deliberately took active organisational actions with the aim of continuing the unlawful activities of an extremist organisation prohibited by the court".

The case against Stashevsky reached Sevastopol's Gagarin District Court on 30 March, where it was assigned to Judge Valentin Norets. A preliminary hearing was held on 13 May, according to court records. The defence argued that Stashevsky is being prosecuted solely because of his religious convictions, which violates his Constitutional rights.

Stashevsky complained that he had not been given enough time to review the case against him. Judge Norets rebuked the Prosecutor, Jehovah's Witnesses noted.

Stashevsky's trial is due to resume on the morning of 15 June, according to court records.

Kerch: Armed raids on five homes – without a warrant?

In the early morning of 26 May, separate groups of seven to 10 armed police and OMON riot police officers in masks raided five homes in the eastern Crimean city of Kerch, claiming to be conducting a "survey of premises, buildings and facilities", Jehovah's Witnesses noted. In one case, officers broke down the entrance gate.

Officers questioned at least seven people – including several elderly people – accusing them of being Jehovah's Witnesses.

Officers searching the five homes for up to three hours and seized documents,

publications and electronic devices. In no case did they show a court order authorising the raids, nor did they provide a record of the "survey".

The OMON riot police in Kerch is subject to the National Guard (Rosgvardiya), a force directly subject to the Russian President. The man who answered the phone refused to answer any questions about the 26 May raids. "We didn't participate," he claimed to Forum 18 from Kerch on 5 June. He then referred all enquiries to the National Guard spokesperson in Simferopol and put the phone down.

The National Guard spokesperson, who gave his name only as Anton, refused to answer any questions about the raids by phone on 9 and 10 June.

Officials at Kerch Police repeatedly refused to put Forum 18 through to the Police Chief Aleksandr Voronov. They referred Forum 18 to its spokesperson. However, the spokesperson refused to answer any questions about the raids on 8 June, insisting that all questions must be sent in writing to Crimea's Interior Ministry in Simferopol.

One home raided was that of 29-year-old Artyom Shably, who lives with his wife, their two young children, and his mother. Officers broke the window in the hallway to gain entrance. Shably's four-year-old son cut his foot on the broken glass lying on the floor.

Officers put Shably in handcuffs, forcing him to stand with his head against the wall for several hours in light clothing in the cold wind through the door and broken window before taking him away. He remained in handcuffs for several hours.

Officers took Shably and four others from their homes to the Investigative Department for interrogation. Officers removed the handcuffs from Shably only after the interrogation, but he remained in detention. The other four were freed after about two hours.

Kerch: Criminal case

Investigative Committee Investigator for Especially Important Cases in Kerch, Major Valery Zarubin, had launched a case against Shably under Russian Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 1.1 ("Inclination, recruitment or other involvement of a person in an extremist organisation"). Zarubin accused him of "attracting others into the activity of an extremist organisation" by talking to him about the Bible. He threatened him with an eight-year jail term.

While Shably was in detention, officers summoned his wife for interrogation. "The Investigator tried to pressure her, threatening to imprison her husband," Jehovah's Witnesses said. Officers released her later that day.

Later on 26 May, officers placed Shably in a detention centre. Only on the evening of 28 May, after 48 hours, did they free him. He had to sign a pledge that as a suspect he would present himself when ordered to do so.

Forum 18 was unable to find out why Major Zarubin lodged a criminal case against Shably for exercising his right to freedom of religion or belief. The telephone at the Investigative Committee in Kerch went unanswered each time Forum 18 called between 5 and 10 June.

Six years and a half in prison for 61-year-old Jehovah's Witness Gennady Shpakovskiy

JW World Headquarters (09.06.2020) - The Pskov City Court convicted 61-year-old Gennady Shpakovskiy and sentenced him to six and a half years in prison simply for holding small Christian meetings in his home. This is the longest, harshest sentence handed down to one of Jehovah's Witnesses since the 2017 Russian Supreme Court ruling that effectively criminalized their activity. Gennady did not serve any time in pretrial detention so he faces the full 6.5 years in prison. Gennady was taken into custody in the courtroom. Gennady will appeal his conviction.

Jarrold Lopes, spokesman for Jehovah's Witnesses, states: "Today, Russia has arbitrarily imprisoned another peaceful believer, disregarding its own constitution and international human rights law. The city court's ruling is in defiance of repeated demand by the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention and other prominent international actors to stop arresting, detaining, and prosecuting Jehovah's Witnesses for their peaceful worship. Yet, Russian authorities have persisted, raiding over 120 homes of Jehovah's Witnesses already this year. Undeterred even by COVID-19, Russia unconscionably continues to unconscionably subject peaceful citizens like Gennady to the unsanitary and potentially deadly confines of prison."

In his final address to the judge, Gennady completely rejected the charge against him for "extremism." He recalled that during Soviet times millions of citizens were likewise repressed on false charges—among them were Jehovah's Witnesses who were later rehabilitated by the authorities. "Unfortunately, history repeats itself. Today, the same thing is being done to me and my fellow believers," stated Gennady.

"The so-called evidence against me is that I merely confess the religion of Jehovah's Witnesses, including meeting to watch religious videos with believers, singing songs with them, praying to God Jehovah, and discussing my beliefs with others," said Gennady. He explained that none of these actions are mentioned in Russia's "Law on Combatting Extremist Activities."

"Paradoxically," states defense lawyer Arly Chimirov, "at one of the last hearings, Judge Galina Belik personally emphasized that the practice of religion, joint meetings, and prayers are not a crime, but a right of all Russian citizens enshrined in Article 28 of the Constitution of Russia."

How did this happen?

- In early 2018, FSB agents wiretapped the Shpakovskiy family's apartment and monitored their activity for several months. On June 3, 2018, at 12:45 p.m., FSB agents and armed National Guard officers forced open the front door of the Shpakovskiy's apartment, where a few were present for a peaceful Christian meeting. The FSB and National Guard searched the apartment for six hours.
- The FSB agents confiscated tablets and cell phones and took the Witnesses away for questioning. The interrogators insulted the Witnesses and threatened them with dismissal from work as well as criminal prosecution. Gennady's interrogation lasted until 10 p.m.
- On March 19, 2019, Gennady was charged with organizing the activities of an "extremist" organization. Five months later, Gennady was also charged with "financing extremist activities."
- Hearings began November 5, 2019, with Judge Galina Belik presiding ([summary of court proceedings](#))

Special bimonthly FORB digest (17-31.05.2020)

29.05.2020 - Hit, twisted, handcuffed: details of an aggressive invasion against a 68-year-old believer in Khabarovsk

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2020/05/22.html>

On May 27, 2020, during searches of believers in Khabarovsk and Vyazemsky, FSB officers invaded in the house of 68-year-old Lee Yen Sen. An armed, masked operative hit Lee Yen Sen in the side, twisted his hands and put him in handcuffs. His wife lost consciousness as a result of such inhuman treatment of the elderly man.

[Continue reading...](#)

28.05.2020 - In Kerch, law enforcers crushed windows when raiding houses of believers during a "survey". A father of two young children was detained

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2020/05/21.html>

On the 26 of May 2020, armed security groups conducted a series of raids in Kerch. At least seven believers, including the elderly, were questioned. Five of them were taken to the investigation department and later released all but Artem Shabliy, 29, who had been detained for two days.

[Continue reading...](#)

28.05.2020 - Three more people prosecuted for their faith in the Sverdlovsk Region. Six defendants are in the case now

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2020/05/20.html>

On May 19, 2020 the investigation expanded the list of defendants in the second criminal case of Pryanikov and others in Karpinsk. New suspects were Anastasia Pryanikova and the Zalyaevs. Now three Uralian families are being prosecuted on far-fetched extremism charges.

[Continue reading...](#)

28.05.2020 - "Dropped to the floor." The details of the searches in Komsomolsk-on-Amur have become known

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2020/05/19.html>

On May 22, 2020 in Komsomolsk-on-Amur two dwellings of local believers were searched. The authorities interrogated four people - Nikolay and Alesya Aliyev, Vyacheslav Dubinkin and Dmitriy Bryankin. The only reason for the raid on these civilians was their faith in God Jehovah.

[Continue reading...](#)

27.05.2020 - The Dagestan Supreme Court ruled to release four believers from the detention center. They spent in prison almost a year

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2020/05/18.html>

On 27 May 2020 the Dagestan Supreme Court replaced the preventive measure for Maria Karpova, Anton Dergalev, Marat Abdulgalimov and Arsen Abdullaev from detention to house arrest. The believers are to be released from the detention center on the same day.

[Continue reading...](#)

27.05.2020 - The Town of Vyazemsky becomes a new hotbed of religious persecution: at least seven searches of believers per day

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2020/05/17.html>

On May 27, 2020 reports of new searches in Khabarovsk Territory came. According to preliminary information, armed officers of the FSB searched Yen Sen Lee, 68, and his wife, as well as 19-year-old believer and his mother. Both men were detained and taken to an unknown location.

[Continue reading...](#)

27.05.2020 - The Court in Crimea upheld the sentence to Sergey Filatov. The believer will go to the colony for 6 years for reading the Bible

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2020/05/16.html>

On May 26, 2020, the Supreme Court of the Republic of Crimea upheld the sentence on Sergey Filatov, a resident of Dzhankoy, ignoring numerous violations in the case and the UN Working Group's demand for the release of Jehovah's Witnesses arrested in Russia. Filatov's only fault was reading the Bible with his family and friends.

[Continue reading...](#)

26.05.2020 - In Krasnoyarsk, two more local residents accused of extremism, raising number prosecuted for their faith in the region to 12

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2020/05/15.html>

Residents of Krasnoyarsk, 53-year-old Vitaliy Sukhov and 55-year-old Igor Gusev, are accused of extremism only because they discussed the Bible with fellow believers and prayed to God Jehovah.

[Continue reading...](#)

25.05.2020 - Mice, pneumonia and unreasonable penalties: How Dennis Christensen, a prisoner of conscience, is serving his sentence three years after his arrest

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2020/05/14.html>

25 May 2020 marks exactly three years since the Danish citizen who lives in Oryol Dennis Christensen was taken into custody. Dennis' health has deteriorated during his imprisonment. Now the prison administration is not giving him any medication and is trying to prevent him from being released.

[Continue reading...](#)

22.05.2020 - The City of Komsomolsk-on-Amur has joined the religious persecution: Search in the family of believers, detention and interrogation

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2020/05/13.html>

On May 22, 2020 the apartment of 46-year-old Dmitriy Bryankin, who lives there with his wife and daughters, was searched. The head of the family was taken away for interrogation. Two more families of believers are not in touch. Details are being clarified.

[Continue reading...](#)

22.05.2020 - The houses of six believers were searched in Kabardino-Balkaria. The law enforcers planted banned literature on them

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2020/05/12.html>

On May 20, 2020, law enforcers searched five houses in the city of May. Six believers - a married couple and four other women - were taken to the investigation department for questioning and later released, "off the record" asking about their religious views.

[Continue reading...](#)

21.05.2020 - Third decision of UN working group on arbitrary detention regarding Russian Jehovah's Witnesses

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2020/05/11.html>

On May 6, 2020, the UN Human Rights Council Working Group on Arbitrary Detention prepared a decision concerning 18 believers in Russia. The Group considers the cases brought against them to be unlawful, urges authorities to immediately release those arrested, in connection with the COVID-19 pandemic, and to "take appropriate measures against those responsible for the violation of their rights."

[Continue reading...](#)

20.05.2020 - Crimean human rights - situation review

Case of Crimean Muslims

Defendants are accused of membership in Muslim religious organizations or propaganda of activities of the organizations that are declared terrorist or extremist in the RF though they are not according to the Ukrainian laws.

[Continue reading...](#)

20.05.2020 - List of 93 Muslims detained on political and religious grounds

As of end of April 2020, 93 persons were deprived of liberty within a politically motivated criminal or religious persecution. The full list is published at the CHRГ website.

[Continue reading...](#)

20.05.2020 - Appeal proceedings on sentence of Artiom Gerasimov, a 'Jehovah's Witness', started in Crimea

In the "Supreme Court" of Crimea on May 19, 2020, a hearing was held to consider the appeal of Mr. Artiom Gerasimov, a supporter of the Jehovah's Witnesses religious organization, and a resident of Yalta.

[Continue reading...](#)

19.05.2020 - Konstantin Bazhenov, born in Veliky Novgorod, became the second of Jehovah's Witnesses penalized with annulled Russian citizenship

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2020/05/9.html>

On May 15, 2020, the administration of Colony No. 3 of Dimitrovgrad notified Konstantin Bazhenov, convicted for faith, that his Russian citizenship was annulled. In 2009 Konstantin and his wife moved back from Ukraine to Russia, where they received citizenship.

[Continue reading...](#)

18.05.2020 - Another Witness of Jehovah was sent to jail. New criminal case near the Chinese border in the town of Lesozavodsk

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2020/05/8.html>

Yevgeniy Grinenko, 49, was placed in custody for two months until July 12, 2020. A criminal case has been instituted against this peaceful believer, charging "organization of an extremist organization" prohibited under Part 1 of Article 282.2 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation.

[Continue reading...](#)

17.05.2020 - Eight Jehovah's Witnesses are subjects of criminal case in Siberian city

Link to full text in Russian: <https://www.sibreal.org/a/30616596.html>

The prosecutor's office in Khakassia returned a criminal case against Jehovah's Witnesses Roman Baranovskii and his 68-year-old mother, Valentina Baranovskaia, to the investigator, the website of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia reported.

[Continue reading...](#)

May 2020 - Misuse of Anti-Extremism in April 2020

Prosecutions of Muslims and Jehovah's Witnesses

[Continue reading...](#)

CRIMEA: JW Artem Gerasimov: six years in prison

JW.ORG (04.06.2020) - On 4 June, the Crimean Supreme Court sentenced Artem Gerasimov to six years in prison for his peaceful Christian worship as one of Jehovah's Witnesses. He was seeking acquittal from his original sentence by the Yalta City Court, which was a fine for 400,000 rubles. Today's ruling immediately came into force and Artem was taken into custody.

Jarrold Lopes, spokesman for Jehovah's Witnesses, states: "Today's ruling by the Crimean Supreme Court brings religious persecution to a new level of cruelty. Since the 2017 Russian Supreme Court's ruling that effectively banned Jehovah's Witnesses, this is the first time an appeal has resulted in a more severe punishment. This bleak development in Crimea is the latest example of Russia exporting its patently extreme religious intolerance. Human rights advocates across the globe have publicly criticized Russia for its baseless attack on Jehovah's Witnesses, internationally recognized as peaceful, societally responsible Christians. We hope that senior officials in Russia will soon correct the injustice being doled out in their local courts and that judges in Crimea will follow suit."

Artem is the second one of Jehovah's Witnesses to be imprisoned in Crimea under Russian law. Artem's new sentence now matches the sentence of Sergey Filatov, who was likewise convicted on March 5, 2020, but by the Dzhankoysky District Court.

HRWF Comment

Crimea has been de facto under Russian rule since its annexation in 2014 although it is still de jure part of Ukraine.

[Read on hrwf.org](http://www.hrwf.org)

CRIMEA: Freedom of thought, conscience and religion in Crimea under Russian rule (April)

Crimea Human Rights Group (22.05.2020) - <https://bit.ly/3doVMMR> - On April 1, the "prosecutor" of Alushta opened administrative proceedings against Mr. **Yusuf Ashirov**, the imam of the "Alushta" religious community, for "illegal missionary activity" under Article 5.26-4 of the Code of Administrative Offences of the Russian Federation (RF

CoAO) (*Illegal missionary activity*). The reason for this was holding Friday prayers, (27), a traditional rite for Muslims.

On April 22, it became known that Mr. **Diliaver Khalilov**, the imam of the Sovetsky District of Crimea, had been called up to the "Prosecutor's Office", where he had been charged of RF CoAO Article 20.2-2 (*organization of an unauthorized public event*) for holding Friday prayers. The lawyer said that initially there had been an attempt to convict the imam under RF CoAO Article 5.26- 4, but then the qualification was changed. The 'Prosecutor's Office' stated that the imam had not re-registered the mosque building under Russian laws after 2014, so the mosque building was a sports complex (28). On April 29, Igor Brazhnik, a judge of ' Sovetsky District Court', fined Mr. Khalilov (29) RUR30,000. (30)

In April the CHRG documented 3 new administrative procedures against the religious organizations of Crimea under RF CoAO Article 5.26-3. On April 21 judge Artem Cherkashyn fined the **Seventh-Day Adventist Church in Bakhchisaray District** RUR30,000, (31), on April 22 judge Ullubiy Isayev fined the "**Light to World**" **Church of the Evangelical Christians from Yalta** RUR30,000 (32). The case of the '**Jewish Religious Community of Simferopol City**' is still being considered. (33)

27. CHRG / 'Prosecutor's Office Accused Imam in Alushta of 'Illegal Missnary Activity'
<https://bit.ly/2ZVEx1R>
28. <https://bit.ly/2ZWKADa>
29. «Sovetsky District Court» / List of cases to be heard on 29 April 2020. Case 5-118,2020 -
<https://bit.ly/2MkeysM>
30. <https://bit.ly/3gHJSQf>
31. «Judges of peace of Republic of Crimea» / Case 05-0162/28/2020 <http://mirsud82.rk.gov.ru>
32. «Judges of peace of Republic of Crimea» / Case 05-0117/28/2020 <http://mirsud82.rk.gov.ru>
33. «Judges of peace of Republic of Crimea» / Case 05-0142/28/2020 <http://mirsud82.rk.gov.ru>

UN Working Group condemns detentions. Trial list

By Victoria Arnold

Forum 18 (21.05.2020) - <https://bit.ly/2A2QBnd> - Full list of 93 people currently on trial for exercising the right to freedom of religion and belief as Jehovah's Witnesses. The UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention has adopted a wide-ranging Opinion condemning the "ever-growing number of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia who have been arrested, detained and charged with criminal activity on the basis of mere exercise of freedom of religion".

Three years after the Supreme Court ordered the liquidation as "extremist" of all Jehovah's Witness associations in April 2017, 93 people are on trial on charges of "continuing the activities of a banned extremist organisation" for exercising the right to freedom of religion and belief. During the coronavirus pandemic fewer raids have been made on homes, but have not stopped.

On 1 May 2020, the United Nations (UN) Working Group on Arbitrary Detention adopted a wide-ranging Opinion condemning the raids, arrests, detention and trials of 18 Jehovah's Witnesses, stating it "wishes to emphasize that none of them should have been arrested and held in pre-trial detention and no trial of any of them should take or should have taken place" (see below and forthcoming F18News article).

The Working Group noted that the 18 "are part of now ever-growing number of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia who have been arrested, detained and charged with criminal activity on the basis of mere exercise of freedom of religion, a right protected by article 18 of the Covenant" (see below and forthcoming F18News article).

Court proceedings can be lengthy, and property – such as cars or money – can be seized as surety for any subsequent fines. Employers have fired at least 18 people from their jobs under pressure from state agencies, while other Jehovah's Witnesses are pressured to resign "of their own free will" (see below).

Investigators have also had more than 200 Jehovah's Witnesses' bank accounts blocked, and Jehovah's Witnesses then often encounter problems registering for benefits, buying phone sim cards, and registering and insuring cars (see below).

At least 20 of the 93 people on trial are in their sixties, seventies or eighties. Three of the 93 are currently known to be in detention, despite the risk of coronavirus infection (see below).

Stress relating to the raids and prosecutions is said to have been a factor in the deaths of a 64-year-old and a 61-year-old Jehovah's Witness, both of whom faced trial (see below).

In another case, the FSB security service apparently forced the treatment being given to a Jehovah's Witness in an Ulyanovsk intensive care unit to be stopped (see below).

Jehovah's Witnesses and others in both pre-trial detention and in prisons also face the risk of being tortured. No officials accused in three cases of torture of individuals detained for exercising freedom of religion or belief appear to have been arrested or put on criminal trial, against Russia's legally binding international obligations (see below).

The Russian authorities have also stripped Russian citizenship from three individuals convicted of exercising freedom of religion and belief, one Muslim in 2019 and two Jehovah's Witnesses in 2020. None of the three appears to be a citizen of any other country (see forthcoming F18News article).

A full list is below of those facing criminal prosecution for "continuing the activities of a banned extremist organisation" following the 2017 Supreme Court ban on Jehovah's Witnesses whose cases have reached court for trial.

UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention condemns detentions and trials

On 1 May 2020, the United Nations (UN) Working Group on Arbitrary Detention adopted an Opinion (A/HRC/WGAD/2020/10) in relation to 18 Jehovah's Witnesses, most of whom are currently on trial.

The list includes [Aleksandr Solovyov, the first to be sentenced](#) after the nationwide ban. The others are: Vladimir Kulyasov, Denis Timoshin, Andrey Magliv, Valeriy Shalev, Ruslan Korolev, Viktor Malkov, Yevgeniy Dechko, Vyacheslav Osipov, Valeriy Rogozin, Igor Egozaryan, Sergey Melnik, Valentina Vladimirova, Tatyana Galkevich, Tatyana Shamsheva, Olga Silayeva, Aleksandr Bondarchuk and Sergey Yavushkin.

The Working Group noted that "it is a well-established norm of international law that pre-trial detention should be the exception and not the rule, and that it should be ordered for as short a time as possible". It found that "all 18 individuals were arrested and detained, at different dates and cities in Russia, merely for peacefully exercising their religious

beliefs, including by having in their possession religious texts and Bibles, gathering together for worship with fellow believers, gathering money for the activities of Jehovah's Witnesses and worshipping".

The Working Group pointed out: "All the 18 individuals .. have been charged with various forms of 'extremist activities'. Yet, in view of the Working Group, none of the activities described could be construed as such" (see forthcoming F18News article).

The Working Group stated that "all the activities that they engaged in were the peaceful exercise of their right to freedom of religion under article 18 of the Covenant [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights]. These actions were the sole reason for the arrest of all the 18 individuals and the court proceedings against them."

"Moreover," the Working Group continued, "the private homes of all 18 individuals were subjected to searches during which Bibles and religious texts were seized, which the Working Group considers to be a further breach of article 17 ["Right to Privacy"] and 18 ["Freedom of thought, conscience and religion"] of the Covenant."

The Working Group "wishes to emphasize that none of them should have been arrested and held in pre-trial detention and no trial of any of them should take or should have taken place."

After condemning the trial process, the Working Group also observed that "all arrests were executed with the presence of large number of police officers and use of force" and this "was carried out with the aim of intimidating the 18 individuals in breach of their presumption of innocence as encapsulated in article 14 (2) ["Right to equality before courts and tribunals and to fair trial"] of the Covenant."

The Working Group then went on to note that "these 18 individuals are part of now ever-growing number of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia who have been arrested, detained and charged with criminal activity on the basis of mere exercise of freedom of religion, a right protected by article 18 of the Covenant" (see forthcoming F18News article).

43 trials with 93 defendants

Three years after the Supreme Court [ordered the liquidation as "extremist" of all Jehovah's Witness associations in April 2017, 93 people are on trial on charges of "continuing the activities of a banned extremist organisation" for exercising the right to freedom of religion or belief.](#) They include two men in Khabarovsk who have already been convicted in a separate, overlapping trial, and six people in Penza who are on trial for a second time after an appeal court overturned their convictions.

The Investigative Committee, the FSB security service, the police, and the National Guard have carried out [897 raids on homes in 52 of Russia's 83 federal subjects](#), plus Crimea and Sevastopol, annexed by Russia in 2014 (where there have been three prosecutions resulting in two convictions so far).

During the [coronavirus pandemic fewer raids have been made on homes. These have not stopped, however, with searches taking place recently in Primorye Region \(three addresses on 12 May\), Krasnodar Region \(nine addresses on 29 April\), and Ivanovo Region \(four addresses on 15 April\).](#)

Court proceedings [can be lengthy. As well as the strong possibility of conviction, bringing with it a criminal record and a heavy fine or prison sentence, prosecution and trial can have wider consequences for defendants. Property – such as cars or money – can be seized as surety for any subsequent fines.](#)

Employers have [fired at least 18 people from their jobs under pressure from state agencies, while other Jehovah's Witnesses are pressured to resign "of their own free will"](#).

Investigators have also had [more than 200 Jehovah's Witnesses' bank accounts blocked, and they then often encounter problems registering for benefits, buying phone sim cards, and registering and insuring cars](#).

Elderly people detained, coronavirus risks, FSB force hospital treatment stop

At least [20 of the 93 people on trial are in their sixties, seventies or eighties. The oldest defendant is 85-year-old Yelena Zayshchuk, whom the FSB security service took in for questioning after raiding her home in Vladivostok in April 2018. Her family "do not understand why they are persecuting an elderly and sick person who has done nothing wrong to anyone"](#), Jehovah's Witnesses commented.

Three of the 93 are [currently known to be in detention, despite the risk of coronavirus infection. One of the cellmates of 66-year-old Yury Prokopyevich Savelyov \(who has been in detention since November 2018\) works in the detention centre, bringing him into contact with large numbers of people, and he does not have a mask, gloves or shoe covers. On 22 April 2020, however, Savelyov's detention was again extended regardless of his concerns about his "unfavourable sanitary-epidemiological situation". Court chairwoman Yelena Fetisova told Forum 18 that the judge had taken into account everything relevant and had no medical documentation suggesting that Savelyov's detention should not be extended, and that health protection measures in detention was not within the competence of the court](#).

Yury Geraskov, [who died in Kirov at the age of 64, had not spent any time in detention, but "stress connected with persecution for his faith had negatively affected Yury's health"](#), Jehovah's Witnesses noted. Viktor Malkov, [who died in Smolensk at the age of 61, had spent eight months in detention and nearly four months under house arrest. He had suffered from coronary heart disease and kidney problems. "Viktor's health was largely influenced by poor conditions in pre-trial detention centres and the stress associated with criminal prosecution"](#), Jehovah's Witnesses noted.

Sergey Mysin is on trial in Ulyanovsk despite serious health concerns. Jehovah's Witnesses say [he was discharged early from intensive care in October 2019 after FSB security service officers went to the hospital to insist on his treatment being stopped. Ulyanovsk Region FSB refused to answer any questions from Forum 18](#).

Risk of torture

Jehovah's Witnesses and others in both pre-trial detention and in prisons also face the risk of [being tortured. No officials accused in three cases of torture of individuals detained for exercising freedom of religion or belief appear to have been arrested or put on criminal trial](#), against Russia's legally binding international obligations.

Investigators in Surgut in February 2019 [hooded, kicked, beat and tortured with electric shocks seven Jehovah's Witnesses detained after raids. One of the Jehovah's Witnesses, Sergei Loginov was re-arrested shortly after he called the Investigative Committee's hotline to report his torture. After 56 days in custody, he was released under specific restrictions on 11 April 2019 \(not allowed to go out at night, communicate with others involved in the case, or use the telephone, internet, or post\)](#).

[In contrast, two of the Investigative Committee officials implicated in the torture of the](#)

[Jehovah's Witnesses were subsequently given awards, ostensibly for their work in 2018.](#)

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Full list of those on trial

Full list of those facing criminal prosecution for "continuing the activities of a banned extremist organisation" following the 2017 Supreme Court ban on Jehovah's Witnesses whose cases have reached court for trial. Two of the 93 living defendants are no longer Jehovah's Witnesses. The list also includes two Jehovah's Witnesses who died in April 2020 after their cases reached court.

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- Amur Region

Blagoveshchensk City Court

Case lodged 6 February 2020; next hearing 9 June 2020

- 1) Aleksey Aleksandrovich Berchuk, born 17 November 1975 - case opened 22 June 2018; added to Rosfinmonitoring list 30 August 2018; on trial under Article 282.2, Part 1
- 2) Dmitry Mikhailovich Golik, born 26 March 1987 - case opened 22 June 2018; added to Rosfinmonitoring list 30 August 2018; on trial under Article 282.2, Part 1

Other information: Berchuk spent two days in detention in Moscow after his arrest at an airport on 21 January 2019, before being sent back to Blagoveshchensk under travel restrictions; Golik placed under travel restrictions on unknown date; case investigated by Amur Region FSB

- Arkhangelsk Region

Solombalsky District Court, Arkhangelsk

Case lodged 11 February 2020 at October District Court – transferred to Solombalsky District Court on 19 February 2020 for jurisdictional reasons; next hearing unknown

- 3) Yevgeny Viktorovich Yakku, born 22 February 1980 - case opened 13 February 2019; added to Rosfinmonitoring List 4 April 2019; on trial under Article 282.2, Part 1, Part 1.1, and Part 2

Other information: spent two days in detention before being released under specific conditions; lawyer appealed against transfer to different court – next hearing on 10 June 2020; case investigated by Arkhangelsk Region Investigative Committee

- Bryansk Region

Novozybkov City Court

Case lodged 10 April 2020; next hearing 9 June 2020 (first)

- 4) Tatyana Viktorovna Shamsheva, born 7 June 1977 – case opened 11 June 2019; detained 11 June 2019; released under travel restrictions 10 February 2020; added to Rosfinmonitoring List 10 October 2019; on trial under Article 282.2, Part 2
- 5) Olga Sergeyevna Silayeva, born 11 May 1988 – case opened 11 June 2019; detained 11 June 2019; released under travel restrictions 10 February 2020; added to Rosfinmonitoring List 10 October 2019; on trial under Article 282.2, Part 2

6) Vladimir Aleksandrovich Khokhlov, born 9 April 1977 – case opened 16 October 2019; detained 24 October 2019; added to Rosfinmonitoring List 11 December 2019; on trial under Articles 282.2, Part 1 and 282.3 Part 1

7) Eduard Vladimirovich Zhinzhikov, born 9 November 1971 – case opened 16 October 2019; detained on 24 October 2019; added to Rosfinmonitoring List 11 December 2019; on trial under Articles 282.2, Part 1 and 282.3, Part 1

Other information: Case against the men derived from earlier case against the women, investigated by Bryansk Region Investigative Committee.

- Chelyabinsk Region

Central District Court, Chelyabinsk

Case lodged 4 March 2020; next hearing 2 June 2020 (first full hearing)

8) Dmitry Yuryevich Vinogradov, born 9 September 1963 - case opened 20 January 2020; placed under travel restrictions 20 January 2020; added to Rosfinmonitoring List 5 March 2020; on trial under Article 282.2, Part 2

Other information: case apparently derived from earlier case against Valentina Suvorova, also in Chelyabinsk (see below); case investigated by Chelyabinsk Region Investigative Committee

Metallurgical District Court, Chelyabinsk

Case lodged 7 February 2020; next hearing 3 June 2020

9) Valentina Anatolyevna Suvorova, born 18 January 1948 - case opened 18 March 2019; added to Rosfinmonitoring List 16 January 2020; on trial under Article 282.2, Part 2

Other information: home raided among others on 26 March 2019, but not charged until 5 December 2019; placed under travel restrictions on unknown date; case investigated by Chelyabinsk Region Investigative Committee; accused of deliberately talking to residents about religion, singing hymns, praying, and studying religious literature, according to the indictment

- Ivanovo Region

Furmanov City Court

Case lodged 22 January 2020; next hearing unknown (proceedings suspended indefinitely because of pandemic)

10) Yevgeny Andreyevich Spirin, born 24 February 1986 - case opened 21 January 2019; arrested 27 January 2019; transferred to house arrest 18 December 2019; released under no restrictions 18 December 2019; on trial under Article 282.2, Part 1

Other information: not on Rosfinmonitoring List; case investigated by Ivanovo Region FSB

- Jewish Autonomous Region

Obluchye District Court

Case lodged 4 March 2020; next hearing 2 June 2020

11) Anastasiya Nikolayevna Sychyova, born 5 May 1977 - case opened 20 November 2019; added to Rosfinmonitoring List 10 October 2019; on trial under Article 282.2, Part 2

Other information: placed under travel restrictions on unknown date; case investigated by Jewish Autonomous Region FSB

Birobidzhan District Court

Case lodged 3 March 2020; next hearing unknown (proceedings postponed indefinitely because of pandemic)

12) Yuliya Fyodorovna Kaganovich, born 5 May 1966 - case opened 10 October 2019; added to Rosfinmonitoring List 24 October 2019; on trial under Article 282.2, Part 2

Other information: placed under travel restrictions on unknown date; case investigated by Jewish Autonomous Region FSB

Birobidzhan District Court

Case lodged 3 March 2020; next hearing unknown (proceedings postponed indefinitely because of pandemic)

13) Yelena Allanovna Reyno-Chernyshova, born 21 June 1968 - case opened 29 September 2019; added to Rosfinmonitoring List 10 October 2019; on trial under Article 282.2, Part 2

Other information: placed under travel restrictions on unknown date; case investigated by Jewish Autonomous Region FSB

Birobidzhan District Court

Case lodged 3 March 2020; next hearing unknown (proceedings postponed indefinitely because of pandemic)

14) Svetlana Yakovlevna Monis, born 15 July 1977 - case opened 26 September 2019; added to Rosfinmonitoring List 10 October 2019; on trial under Article 282.2, Part 2

Other information: placed under travel restrictions on unknown date; home raided on 17 May 2018, after which her husband Alam Aliyev was detained for 8 days, before being released under travel restrictions (he is also facing charges in a separate case which has not yet reached court); case investigated by Jewish Autonomous Region FSB

Birobidzhan District Court

Case lodged 3 March 2020; next hearing unknown (proceedings postponed indefinitely because of pandemic)

15) Larisa Aleksandrovna Artamonova, born 7 September 1970 - case opened 25 September 2019; added to Rosfinmonitoring List 10 October 2019; on trial under Article 282.2, Part 2

Other information: placed under travel restrictions on unknown date; case investigated by Jewish Autonomous Region FSB

Birobidzhan District Court

Case lodged 23 December 2019; next hearing unknown (proceedings suspended indefinitely because of pandemic)

16) Artur Sergeevich Lokhvitsky, born 31 January 1986 - case opened 31 July 2019; added to Rosfinmonitoring List 21 August 2019; put under travel restrictions 15 August 2019; on trial under Article 282.2, Part 2

Other information: case investigated by Jewish Autonomous Region FSB

Birobidzhan District Court

Case lodged 23 December 2019; next hearing unknown (proceedings suspended indefinitely because of pandemic)

17) Yevgeny Anatolyevich Golik, born 27 October 1975 - case opened 30 July 2019; added to Rosfinmonitoring List 21 August 2019; on trial under Article 282.2, Part 2

Other information: placed under travel restrictions on unknown date; case investigated by Jewish Autonomous Region FSB

Birobidzhan District Court

Case lodged 23 December 2019; next hearing unknown (proceedings postponed indefinitely because of pandemic)

18) Igor Olegovich Tsaryov, born 14 May 1974 - case opened 30 July 2019; added to Rosfinmonitoring List 21 August 2019; on trial under Article 282.2, Part 2

Other information: placed under travel restrictions on unknown date; case investigated by Jewish Autonomous Region FSB

Birobidzhan District Court

Case lodged 23 December 2019; next hearing unknown (proceedings postponed indefinitely because of pandemic)

19) Yevgeny Viktorovich Yegorov, born 19 February 1991 - case opened 29 July 2019; added to Rosfinmonitoring List 21 August 2019; on trial under Article 282.2, Part 2

Other information: placed under travel restrictions on unknown date; case investigated by Jewish Autonomous Region FSB

Birobidzhan District Court

Case lodged 23 December 2019; next hearing unknown (proceedings suspended indefinitely because of pandemic)

20) Konstantin Viktorovich Guzev, born 16 June 1964 - case opened 29 July 2018; added to Rosfinmonitoring List 21 August 2019; on trial under Article 282.2, Part 2

Other information: placed under travel restrictions on unknown date; case derived from prosecution of Alam Aliyev (not yet on trial); case investigated by Jewish Autonomous Region FSB

- Kamchatka Region

Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky City Court

Case lodged 10 February 2020; next hearing unknown (proceedings suspended indefinitely because of pandemic)

21) Sergey Mikhailovich Ledenyov, born 23 July 1974 - case opened 2 December 2018; added to Rosfinmonitoring List 22 May 2019; on trial under Article 282.2, Part 1

Other information: placed under specific restrictions on unknown date; case investigated by Kamchatka Region Investigative Committee

Yelizovo District Court

Case lodged 15 January 2020 (previously lodged on 11 September 2019); next hearing 1 June 2020

22) Konstantin Aleksandrovich Bazhenov, born 24 July 1977 - case opened 17 August 2018; added to Rosfinmonitoring List 11 October 2018; on trial under Article 282.2, Part 1

23) Snezhana Yevgenyevna Bazhenova, born 20 December 1977- case opened 17 August 2018; added to Rosfinmonitoring List 11 October 2018; on trial under Article 282.2, Part 1

24) Vera Ivanovna Zolotova, born 20 October 1946 - case opened 17 August 2018; added to Rosfinmonitoring List 11 October 2018; on trial under Article 282.2, Part 1

Other information: spent two days in temporary detention after their arrest on 19 August 2018, before Zolotova and Bazhenova were released under travel restrictions and Bazhenov was placed in pre-trial detention (he was also released under travel restrictions after 8 days); case sent back to prosecutors on 14 November 2019 but decision overturned on appeal on 9 January 2020; case investigated by Kamchatka Region Investigative Committee; prosecution witnesses cannot point Bazhenov and Zolotova out in court and one confuses Bazhenov with a lawyer; another prosecution witness claims she was made to sign a statement she did not read

- Kemerovo Region

Factory District Court, Kemerovo

Case lodged 30 March 2020; next hearing 27 May 2020

25) Aleksandr Iosifovich Bondarchuk, born 13 July 1974, - case opened 22 July 2019; under house arrest since 24 July 2019 after two days in detention: added to Rosfinmonitoring List 14 August 2019; on trial under Articles 282.2 Part 2; 282.3 Part 1

26) Sergey Nikolayevich Yavushkin, born 4 August 1960 - case opened 22 July 2019; under house arrest since 24 July 2019 after two days in detention: added to Rosfinmonitoring List 14 August 2019; on trial under Articles 282.2 Part 2; 282.3 Part 1

Other information: both men's homes raided at 6am 22 July 2019 and their electronic devices seized; case investigated by Kemerovo Region Investigative Committee; cars seized by court order 29 July 2019 "in order to ensure the fulfilment of a court verdict in terms of property penalties in the form of a fine as criminal punishment"

Beryozovsky City Court

Case lodged 15 July 2019; next hearing 1 June 2020

27) Khasan Abduvaitovich Kogut, born 7 May 1983 - case opened 6 February 2019; added to Rosfinmonitoring List 28 February 2019; spent two days in detention after being summoned to FSB offices 6 February 2019, followed by 202 days under house arrest; released under travel restrictions 26 August 2019; on trial under Article 282.2, Part 2

Other information: home searched 22 July 2018 but not charged until 6 February 2019, after his case was separated from the case against Levchuk and Britvin; case being investigated by Kemerovo Region FSB

Beryozovsky City Court

Case lodged 3 June 2019; next hearing 22 May 2020

28) Sergey Alekseyevich Britvin, born 18 August 1965 - case opened 19 July 2018; added to Rosfinmonitoring List 22 November 2018; on trial under Article 282.2, Part 1

29) Vadim Anatolyevich Levchuk, born 6 February 1972 - case opened 19 July 2018; added to Rosfinmonitoring List 22 November 2018; on trial under Article 282.2, Part 1

Other information: spent 524 days in detention, the house arrest since 25 December 2019; case investigated by Kemerovo Region FSB

- Khabarovsk Region

Industrial District Court, Khabarovsk

Case lodged 18 July 2019; next hearing 26 May 2020

30) Maya Pavlovna Karpushkina, born 19 March 1949 - case opened 10 November 2018; on trial under Article 282.2, Part 2

31) Stanislav Viktorovich Kim, born 5 July 1968 - case opened 10 November 2018; on trial under Article 282.2, Part 1

32) Nikolai Yuryevich Polevodov, born 10 February 1970 - case opened 10 November 2018; on trial under Article 282.2, Part 1

33) Svetlana Grigoryevna Sedova, born 8 June 1969 - case opened 10 November 2018; on trial under Article 282.2, Part 2,

34) Tatyana Valentinovna Zhuk, born 13 March 1973 - case opened 10 November 2018; on trial under Article 282.2, Part 2

35) Vitaly Vyacheslavovich Zhuk, born 8 April 1972 - case opened 10 November 2018; on trial under Article 282.2, Part 1

Other information: none on Rosfinmonitoring List; Karpushkina, Sedova, and Tatyana Zhuk placed under travel restrictions after their arrest at a gathering in a rented café on 10 November 2018; Kim – 82 days in detention and 354 days under house arrest before being released under no restrictions; Polevodov – 66 days in detention and 201 days under house arrest before being released under travel restrictions; Vitaly Zhuk – 66 days in detention and 370 days under house arrest, now no restrictions; case being investigated by Khabarovsk Region Investigative Committee; Kim and Polevodov have already been convicted under Article 282.2, Part 2 and are on probation

- Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Region

Uray City Court

Case lodged 30 April 2020; next hearing unknown – none yet scheduled

36) Andrey Vladimirovich Sazonov, born 15 August 1980 - case opened 31 January 2019; added to Rosfinmonitoring List 10 October 2019; on trial under Articles 282.2, Part

1; 282.3 Part 1

Other information: spent 20 days in detention and 178 days under house arrest after his arrest on 6 February 2019, before being released under specific restrictions on 22 August 2019; case investigated by Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Region Investigative Committee

- Kirov Region

October District Court, Kirov

Case lodged 21 January 2020; next hearing 29 May 2020

37) Anatoly Mikhailovich Tokarev, born 31 December 1958 - case opened 8 May 2019; added to Rosfinmonitoring List 4 July 2019; on trial under Articles 282.2, Part 1; 282.3 Part 1

Other information: placed under travel restrictions on unknown date; case investigated by Kirov Region Investigative Committee

Lenin District Court, Kirov

Case lodged 17 April 2020; next hearing unknown – none yet scheduled

38) Aleksandr Petrovich Shamov, born 4 November 1960 - case opened 26 March 2019; added to Rosfinmonitoring List 30 April 2019; on trial under Articles 282.2, Part 1; ?and 282.3 Part 1

39) Andrey Vladimirovich Shchepin, born 11 June 1991 - case opened 26 March 2019; arrested 26 March 2019; released under travel restrictions 28 March 2019; added to Rosfinmonitoring List 30 April 2019; on trial under Articles 282.2, Part 1; ?and 282.3 Part 1

40) Yevgeny Georgiyevich Udintsev, born 14 March 1949 - case opened 26 March 2019; added to Rosfinmonitoring List 30 April 2019; on trial under Articles 282.2, Part 1; ?and 282.3 Part 1

Other information: Shamov and Udintsev appear to be under no restrictions; case investigated by Kirov Region Investigative Committee.

Pervomaysky District Court, Kirov

Case lodged 17 March 2020; next hearing 25 May 2020 (first)

41) Yury Mikhailovich Geraskov, 12 January 1956 – 24 April 2020 - case opened 3 October 2018; on trial at the date of his death under Articles 282.2, Part 1; 282.3, Part 1

42) Maksim Valeryevich Khalturin, born 3 September 1974 - case opened 3 October 2018; added to Rosfinmonitoring List 15 November 2018; on trial under Articles 282.2, Part 1; 282.3, Part 1

43) Vladimir Aleksandrovich Korobeynikov, born 14 December 1952 - case opened 3 October 2018; added to Rosfinmonitoring List 15 November 2018; on trial under Articles 282.2, Part 1; 282.3, Part 1

44) Andrzej [Anatolyevich] Oniszczyk, born 3 October 1968 - case opened 3 October 2018; added to Rosfinmonitoring List 15 November 2018; on trial under Articles 282.2, Part 1; 282.3, Part 1

45) Andrey Sergeyevich Suvorkov, born 26 February 1993 - case opened 3 October

2018; added to Rosfinmonitoring List 15 November 2018; on trial under Articles 282.2, Part 1; 282.3, Part 1

46) Yevgeny Anatolyevich Suvorkov, born 3 February 1978 - case opened 3 October 2018; added to Rosfinmonitoring List 15 November 2018; on trial under Articles 282.2, Part 1; 282.3, Part 1

47) Vladimir Petrovich Vasilyev, born 22 November 1956 - case opened 3 October 2018; on trial under Articles 282.2, Part 1; 282.3, Part 1

Other information: Oniszczyk spent 330 days in detention before being released under travel restrictions on 3 September 2019; Yevgeny Suvorkov spent 177 days in detention and 181 days under house arrest before being released under travel restrictions on 30 September 2019; Andrey Suvorkov spent 117 days in detention and 93 days under house arrest before being released under travel restrictions on 24 August 2019; Khalturin spent 117 days in detention and 193 days under house arrest before being released under travel restrictions on 30 September 2019; Korobeynikov spent 73 days in detention and 284 days under house arrest before being released under travel restrictions on 30 September 2019; Geraskov and Vasilyev apparently under no restrictions; Oniszczyk, a Polish citizen, is the first foreigner to be tried since Dennis Christensen (a Dane) and the first in connection with the nationwide ban; case investigated by Kirov Region Investigative Committee.

- Kostroma Region

Sverdlovsk District Court, Kostroma

Case lodged 6 February 2020 (originally 25 June 2019); next hearing unknown

48) Sergey Alekseyevich Rayman, born 5 October 1996 - case opened 24 July 2018; on trial under Article 282.2, Part 1

49) Valeriya Aleksandrovna Rayman, born 21 May 1993 - case opened 24 July 2018; on trial under Article 282.2, Part 2

Other information: not on Rosfinmonitoring List; Sergey spent 59 days in detention after their arrest on 25 July 2018, 30 days under house arrest, and 90 days under specific restrictions before being placed under travel restrictions – Valeriya spent 2 days in detention and 79 days under specific restrictions before being placed under travel restrictions; judge sent case back to prosecutors on 25 September 2019, citing violations in the indictment and noting that "in this instance, there is a legal right to the profession of the Jehovah's Witness religion, which was not prohibited by the Supreme Court's decision of 20 April 2017" – decision upheld by appeal court, but prosecutors resubmit case; case investigated by Central District Investigative Department of the Kostroma Region Investigative Committee.

- Krasnoyarsk Region

Minusinsk City Court

Case lodged 31 December 2019; next hearing 22 May 2020

50) Dmitry Anatolyevich Maslov, born 7 September 1976 - case opened 19 April 2019; added to Rosfinmonitoring List 20 June 2019; on trial under Article 282.2, Part 1

Other information: after two days in detention, put under an obligation to present himself to investigators when summoned; case investigated by Minusinsk District Investigative Department of Krasnoyarsk Region Investigative Committee.

Railway District Court, Krasnoyarsk
Case lodged 18 February 2020; next hearing unknown

51) Andrey Garafetanovich Stupnikov, born 17 September 1973 - case opened 3 July 2018; added to Rosfinmonitoring List 20 June 2019; on trial under Article 282.2, Part 1

Other information: spent 241 days in detention from the day after his arrest on 3 July 2018, then 124 days under house arrest before being released under specific restrictions on 2 July 2019; case investigated first by Railway District Investigative Department of Krasnoyarsk Region Investigative Committee, then by Krasnoyarsk Region Investigative Committee

- Novosibirsk Region

Lenin District Court, Novosibirsk
Case lodged 22 October 2019; next hearing 18 June 2020

52) Yury Prokopyevich Savelyov, born 1 January 1954 - case opened 7 November 2018; added to Rosfinmonitoring List 18 December 2018; on trial under Article 282.2, Part 1

Other information: in detention at Investigation Prison No. 1, Novosibirsk (including 14 days in a punishment cell in October 2019); not charged until August 2019; case investigated by Novosibirsk Region Investigative Committee

- Omsk Region

Pervomaysky District Court, Omsk
Case lodged 6 December 2019 (originally 24 October 2019 at Lenin District Court but transferred for jurisdictional reasons); next hearing none (proceedings suspended, probably because of pandemic)

53) Gaukhar Magauinovna Bektimirova, born 1 January 1976 - case opened 20 June 2018; added to Rosfinmonitoring List 21 November 2019; on trial under Article 282.2, Part 2

54) Dinara Khayrollayevna Dyusekeyeva, born 24 October 1982- case opened 20 June 2018; added to Rosfinmonitoring List 21 November 2019; on trial under Article 282.2, Part 2

55) Anastasiya Andreyevna Polyakova, born 25 May 1984- case opened 20 June 2018; added to Rosfinmonitoring List 15 August 2018; on trial under Article 282.2, Part 2

56) Sergey Valeryevich Polyakov, 28 April 1972- case opened 20 June 2018; added to Rosfinmonitoring List 15 August 2018; on trial under Articles 282.2, Part 1, 282.3, Part 1

Other information: Polyakovs spent 156 days in detention after their arrest on 4 July 2018 and 91 days under house arrest, before being released under travel restrictions on 4 March 2019; Dyusekeyeva and Bektimirova were placed under an obligation to present themselves to investigators when summoned, on 28 June 2019 and 1 July 2019 respectively; case investigated by Omsk Region Investigative Committee

- Penza Region

Lenin District Court, Penza

Case lodged 9 April 2020 (retrial); 1 July 2019 (original trial); next hearing unknown (proceedings suspended indefinitely because of pandemic)

57) Tatyana Sergeyevna Alushkina, born 12 September 1963 - case opened 11 July 2018; added to Rosfinmonitoring List 30 May 2019; on trial under Article 282.2, Part 2

58) Vladimir Aleksandrovich Alushkin, 30 June 1964 - case opened 11 July 2018; added to Rosfinmonitoring List 6 September 2018; on trial under Article 282.2, Part 1

59) Vladimir Aleksandrovich Kulyasov, born 17 April 1974 - case opened 11 July 2018; added to Rosfinmonitoring List 6 September 2018; on trial under Article 282.2, Part 2

60) Andrey Aleksandrovich Magliv, 20 June 1984 - case opened 11 July 2018; added to Rosfinmonitoring List 6 September 2018; on trial under Article 282.2, Part 2

61) Galiya Anvarovna Olkhova, born 5 February 1970 - case opened 11 July 2018; added to Rosfinmonitoring List 30 May 2019; on trial under Article 282.2, Part 2

62) Denis Vladimirovich Timoshin, born 23 March 1980 - case opened 11 July 2018; added to Rosfinmonitoring List 6 September 2018; on trial under Article 282.2, Part 2

Other information: Alushkina and Olkhova placed under travel restrictions after their arrest on 15 July 2018; Kulyasov, Magliv, and Timoshin spent two days in detention and 515 days under house arrest until the end of their first trial on 13 December 2019, followed by travel restrictions – Alushkin spent 184 days in detention and 333 days under house arrest before his sentencing, after which he was again detained until 30 March 2020 (five days after the successful appeal on 25 March 2020); case investigated by Bessonovsky Inter-District Investigative Department of Penza Region Investigative Committee

- Pskov Region

Pskov City Court

Case lodged 26 September 2019; next hearing 1 June 2020

63) Gennady Valerianovich Shpakovsky, born 6 October 1958 - case opened 31 May 2018; added to Rosfinmonitoring List 6 July 2018; arrested in raid on his home 3 June 2018 and placed under travel restrictions; on trial under Articles 282.2, Part 1, 282.3, Part 1

Other information: case investigated by Pskov Region FSB

- Primorye Region

Nazdezhdinsky District Court

Case lodged 28 April 2020; next hearing 26 May 2020 (first)

64) Lyudmila Aleksandrovna Shut, born 22 November 1947 - case opened 10 February 2020; added to Rosfinmonitoring List 25 February 2020; under travel restrictions from March 2020; on trial under Article 282.2, Part 2

Other information: originally witness in case against Grigory Bubnov (convicted on 21 January 2020), then suspect in case opened on 1 July 2019 against several Primorye

Jehovah's Witnesses, which was later divided; case investigated by Primorye Region Investigative Committee

Pervorechensky District Court, Vladivostok

Case lodged 8 May 2020; next hearing 17 June 2020 (first)

65) Yelena Mikhailovna Barmakina, born 9 October 1967 - case opened 6 August 2019; added to Rosfinmonitoring List 12 September 2019; placed under travel restrictions 13 September 2018; on trial under Article 282.2, Part 2

Other information: case investigated by Primorye Region Investigative Committee Partizansk City Court

Case lodged 20 January 2020; next hearing 29 May 2020

66) Irina Gennadyevna Buglak, born 25 January 1975 - case opened 19 April 2019; added to Rosfinmonitoring List 27 June 2019; on trial under Article 282.2, Part 1

Other information: spent 181 days in detention after her arrest on 20 April 2019 and 107 days under house arrest before being released under travel restrictions on 31 January 2020; case investigated by Primorye Region Investigative Committee

Spassky District Court

Case lodged 16 December 2019; next hearing unknown

67) Dmitry Yuryevich Malevany, born 24 April 1990 - case opened 12 November 2018; added to Rosfinmonitoring List 14 February 2019; on trial under Article 282.2, Part 1

68) Olga Alekseyevna Opaleva, born 22 April 1952 - case opened 12 November 2018; added to Rosfinmonitoring List 14 February 2019; on trial under Article 282.2, Part 1.1

69) Olga Aleksandrovna Panyuta, born 11 June 1959 - case opened 12 November 2018; added to Rosfinmonitoring List 14 February 2019; on trial under Article 282.2, Part 1.1

70) Aleksey Borisovich Trofimov, born 23 April 1959 - case opened 12 November 2018; added to Rosfinmonitoring List 14 February 2019; on trial under Article 282.2, Part 1

Other information: all spent two days in detention after their arrest on 25 November 2018 and 357 days under house arrest, before being released under travel restrictions on 19 November 2019; court proceedings suspended on 7 February 2020 for expert analysis to be carried out

Pervorechensky District Court, Vladivostok
Case lodged 13 June 2019; next hearing 5 June 2020

71) Dmitry Viktorovich Barmakin, born 30 May 1974 - case opened 27 July 2018; added to Rosfinmonitoring List 14 February 2019; arrested 28 July 2018; released under specific restrictions 18 October 2019; on trial under Article 282.2, Part 1

Other information: case investigated by Primorye Region Investigative Committee

Lenin District Court, Vladivostok

Case lodged 2 October 2019; next hearing none - case sent back to prosecutors (prosecution appeal pending)

72) Nadezhda Anatolyevna Anoykina, born 11 January 1958 - case opened 9 April 2018; added to Rosfinmonitoring List 25 July 2018; on trial under Article 282.2, Part 2

73) Lyubov Aleksandrovna Galaktionova, born 14 July 1942 - case opened 9 April 2018; added to Rosfinmonitoring List 25 July 2018; on trial under Article 282.2, Part 2

74) Nailya Sunatovna Kogay, born 5 October 1951 - case opened 9 April 2018; added to Rosfinmonitoring List 25 July 2018; on trial under Article 282.2, Part 2

75) Valentin Pavlovich Osadchuk, born 15 March 1976 - case opened 9 April 2018; added to Rosfinmonitoring List 25 July 2018; on trial under Article 282.2, Part 1

76) Nina Ivanovna Purge, born 19 June 1940 - case opened 9 April 2018; added to Rosfinmonitoring List 25 July 2018; on trial under Article 282.2, Part 2

77) Raisa Mikhailovna Usanova, born 28 September 1947 - case opened 9 April 2018; added to Rosfinmonitoring List 25 July 2018; on trial under Article 282.2, Part 2

78) Yelena Viktorovna Zayshchuk, born 25 August 1934 - case opened 9 April 2018; added to Rosfinmonitoring List 25 July 2018; on trial under Article 282.2, Part 2

Other information: Osadchuk spent 278 days in detention and 77 days under house arrest after his arrest on 19 April 2018, before being released under travel restrictions on 5 April 2019 – other defendants all under travel restrictions throughout; case investigated by Primorye Region FSB; on 16 April 2019, court seizes 26,000 Roubles and a car from Osadchuk; judge sent case back to prosecutors on 12 November 2019 – decision upheld by Primorye Regional Court on 27 January 2020; prosecutors appealed to 9th Cassational Court – hearing postponed until 1 June 2020

- Smolensk Region

Industrial District Court, Smolensk

Case lodged 9 April 2020; next hearing 8 June 2020 (first)

79) Yevgeny Vladimirovich Deshko, born 7 May 1989 - case opened 25 April 2019; added to Rosfinmonitoring List 27 June 2019; on trial under Article 282.2, Part 1; ?and 282.3, Part 1

80) Ruslan Nikolayevich Korolyov, born 8 August 1982 - case opened 25 April 2019; added to Rosfinmonitoring List 27 June 2019; on trial under Article 282.2, Part 1; ?and 282.3, Part 1

81) Viktor Ivanovich Malkov, 21 February 1959 – 26 April 2020 - case opened 25 April 2019; added to Rosfinmonitoring List 27 June 2019; on trial at the date of his death under Article 282.2, Part 1; ?and 282.3, Part 1

82) Valery Anatolyevich Shalyev, born 23 September 1977 - case opened 25 April 2019; added to Rosfinmonitoring List 27 June 2019; on trial under Article 282.2, Part 1; ?and 282.3, Part 1

Other information: all detained after arrest on 26 April 2019, then under house arrest (Deshko – 207 days and 117 days; Korolyov 112 days and 220 days; Malkov – 240 days and 87 days; Shalyev – 240 days and 92 days), before being released under travel restrictions; case investigated by Smolensk Region FSB

Sychnyovka District Court

Case lodged 21 November 2019; next hearing unknown

83) Natalya Igoryevna Sorokina, born 12 March 1975 - case opened 7 October 2018; added to Rosfinmonitoring List 27 June 2019; on trial under Article 282.2, Part 1

84) Mariya Vladimirovna Troshina, born 13 February 1977 - case opened 7 October 2018; added to Rosfinmonitoring List 27 June 2019; on trial under Article 282.2, Part 1

Other information: spent 193 days in detention and 194 days under house arrest, before being released under travel restrictions on 25 October 2019; case investigated by Smolensk Region FSB

- Ulyanovsk Region

Zasviyazhsky District Court, Ulyanovsk

Case lodged 7 April 2020; next hearing 22 May 2020

85) Aleksandr Vyacheslavovich Ganin, born 8 January 1957 - case opened 24 February 2019; added to Rosfinmonitoring list 30 May 2019; on trial under Article 282.2, Part 2

86) Khoren Nikolevich Khachikyan, born 25 April 1985 - case opened 24 February 2019; added to Rosfinmonitoring list 6 May 2019; on trial under Article 282.2, Part 2

87) Natalya Aleksandrovna Mysina, born 17 December 1971 - case opened 24 February 2019; added to Rosfinmonitoring list 6 May 2019; on trial under Article 282.2, Part 2

88) Sergey Aleksandrovich Mysin, born 21 June 1965 - case opened 24 February 2019; added to Rosfinmonitoring list 6 May 2019; on trial under Article 282.2, Part 1

89) Andrey Vladimirovich Tabakov, born 23 January 1973 - case opened 24 February 2019; added to Rosfinmonitoring list 6 May 2019; on trial under Article 282.2, Part 2

90) Mikhail Grigoryevich Zelensky, born 7 November 1960 - case opened 24 February 2019; added to Rosfinmonitoring list 6 May 2019; on trial under Article 282.2, Part 2

Other information: Khachikyan, Mysina, Tabakov, and Zelensky spent one day in detention after their arrest on 27 February 2019, then 50-55 days under house arrest before being released under specific restrictions; Mysin spent 55 days in detention and 123 days under house arrest before being released under specific restrictions; Ganin was detained for two days after his arrest on 15 May 2019, before being released under specific restrictions; case investigated by Ulyanovsk Region FSB; property seized from defendants – half a million Roubles and a car from the Mysins, 600,000 Roubles from Tabakov, cars from Ganin, Zelensky, and Khachikyan

- Volgograd Region

Tractor Factory District Court, Volgograd

Case lodged 9 January 2020; next hearing 29 May 2020

91) Igor Artyomovich Yegozaryan, born 17 January 1965 - case opened 16 May 2019; added to Rosfinmonitoring List 19 September 2019; on trial under Article 282.2, Part 1

92) Sergey Nikolayevich Melnik, born 29 June 1972 - case opened 16 May 2019; added to Rosfinmonitoring List 19 September 2019; on trial under Article 282.2, Part 1

93) Valery Aleksandrovich Rogozin, born 25 March 1962 - case opened 16 May 2019; added to Rosfinmonitoring List 19 September 2019; on trial under Articles 282.2, Part 1; 282.3, Part 1

94) Vyacheslav Ivanovich Osipov, born 17 October 1970 (no longer a Jehovah's Witness) - case opened 16 May 2019; added to Rosfinmonitoring List 19 September 2019; on trial under Articles 282.2, Part 1; 282.3, Part 1

95) Denis Petrovich Peresunko, born 11 March 1978 (no longer a Jehovah's Witness) - case opened 16 May 2019; added to Rosfinmonitoring List 19 September 2019; on trial under Articles 282.2, Part 1; 282.3, Part 1

Notes: in detention for 226 days after their arrest on 16 May 2019, before being released under specific restrictions on 26 December 2019; case investigated by Volgograd Region Investigative Committee; charges include "the performance of religious songs and prayers to their God"; two other Jehovah's Witnesses also indicted in this case, but investigators find no evidence of an offence committed by Valentina Aleksandrovna Makhmadagayeva and Olga Alekseyevna Medveyeva and close investigation on 27 November 2019 – removed from Rosfinmonitoring List on 12 March 2020.

43 trials with 93 defendants

By Victoria Arnold

Forum 18 (19.05.2020) - http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2572 - For 93 people on trial in 43 cases for "continuing the activities of a banned extremist organisation" since the Supreme Court ban on Jehovah's Witnesses, court proceedings can be lengthy. As well as the strong possibility of conviction, bringing with it a criminal record and a heavy fine or prison sentence, prosecution and trial can have wider consequences, including blocking of bank accounts, dismissal from work and seizure of property.

Three years after Russia's Supreme Court ordered the liquidation as "extremist" of all Jehovah's Witness associations in April 2017, 93 people are on trial on charges of "continuing the activities of a banned extremist organisation" for exercising the right to freedom of religion or belief. They include two men in Khabarovsk who have already been convicted in a separate, overlapping trial, and six people in Penza who are on trial for a second time after an appeal court overturned their convictions.

Stress relating to the raids and prosecutions is said to have been a factor in the deaths of a 64 year old and a 61 year old Jehovah's Witness, both of whom [died in April before hearings could begin of their cases which had already been lodged in court.](#)

On 1 May 2020, the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention adopted a wide-ranging Opinion (A/HRC/WGAD/2020/10) in relation to 18 Jehovah's Witnesses, most of whom are currently on trial but including [Aleksandr Solovyov, the first to be sentenced](#) after the nationwide ban. It found that their human rights had been violated, stressing that "[none of them should have been arrested and held in pre-trial detention and no trial of any of them should take or should have taken place](#)".

If convicted, the 93 defendants could be imprisoned for up to 10 years or be fined up to twice the average yearly salary. Although the majority are at home under house arrest or various lesser restrictions, three men remain in detention, [despite the widely acknowledged danger of coronavirus in the overcrowded Russian penitentiary system](#). The pandemic has led to the postponement of most court hearings, although defendants have continued to appear in person at hearings to decide restrictive measures.

[Twenty of the 93 people on trial are in their sixties, seventies or eighties. The oldest defendant is 85-year-old Yelena Zayshchuk, whom the FSB security service took in for questioning after raiding her home in Vladivostok in April 2018. Her family "do not understand why they are persecuting an elderly and sick person who has done nothing wrong to anyone"](#).

As of 19 May, more than 350 people are being or have been prosecuted for "continuing the activities" of the Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia, Jehovah's Witnesses state. These cases derive directly from the Supreme Court [ordering the liquidation as "extremist" of all Jehovah's Witness associations in April 2017](#). Three people are in detention and four are under house arrest.

Four other Jehovah's Witnesses have been prosecuted for "extremism"-related offences dating from before the nationwide ban.

Agencies such as the Investigative Committee, the FSB security service, the police, and the National Guard have carried out 897 raids on homes, according to Jehovah's Witnesses. Raids are known to have been launched in 52 of Russia's 83 federal subjects, plus Crimea and Sevastopol, annexed by Russia in 2014 (where there have been three prosecutions resulting in [two convictions so far](#)).

Court proceedings can be lengthy. As well as the strong possibility of conviction, bringing with it a criminal record and a heavy fine or prison sentence, prosecution and trial can have wider consequences for defendants. Property – such as cars or money – can be seized as surety for any subsequent fines (see below).

Employers have fired at least 18 people from their jobs under pressure from state agencies, while other Jehovah's Witnesses are pressured to resign "of their own free will" (see below).

Investigators have also had more than 200 Jehovah's Witnesses' bank accounts blocked, and they then often encounter problems registering for benefits, buying phone sim cards, and registering and insuring cars (see below).

The long cases and the stress associated with them [can cause medical concerns or exacerbate existing conditions](#).

Risk of torture

Jehovah's Witnesses and others in both pre-trial detention and in prisons also face the risk of [being tortured. No officials accused in three cases of torture of individuals detained for exercising freedom of religion or belief appear to have been arrested or put on criminal trial](#), against Russia's legally binding international obligations.

For example, investigators [in Surgut in February 2019 hooded, kicked, beat and tortured seven Jehovah's Witnesses detained after raids with electric shocks. One of the Jehovah's Witnesses, Sergei Loginov was re-arrested shortly after he called the Investigative Committee's hotline to report his torture](#). After 56 days in custody, he was [released](#)

[under specific restrictions on 11 April 2019 \(not allowed to go out at night, communicate with others involved in the case, or use the telephone, internet, or post\). In contrast, two of the Investigative Committee officials implicated in the torture of the Jehovah's Witnesses were subsequently given awards, ostensibly for their work in 2018.](#)

43 trials with 93 defendants

The 43 trials currently underway involve 93 defendants, 33 women and 60 men. Fifty-one people are being tried under [Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 1 \("Organisation of the activity of a social or religious association or other organisation in relation to which a court has adopted a decision legally in force on liquidation or ban on the activity in connection with the carrying out of extremist activity"\)](#). This carries a possible punishment of six to 10 years' imprisonment or a fine of 400,000 to 800,000 Roubles.

Forty-three defendants are facing charges under [Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 2 \("Participation in the activity of a social or religious association or other organisation in relation to which a court has adopted a decision legally in force on liquidation or ban on the activity in connection with the carrying out of extremist activity"\)](#). If convicted, they may receive a sentence of two to six years' imprisonment, a fine of 300,000 to 600,000 Roubles, or one to four years' assigned labour.

Prosecutors have also charged three people under [Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 1.1 \("Inclination, recruitment or other involvement of a person in an extremist organisation"\)](#) and 21 people under Criminal Code Article 282.3, Part 1 ("Financing of extremist activity"), some in addition to the charges outlined above.

If a person is convicted under [Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 1.1, the judge may impose a sentence of four to eight years' imprisonment, a 300,000 to 700,000 Rouble fine, or two to five years' assigned labour](#). Criminal Code Article 282.3, Part 1 carries possible punishments of three to eight years' imprisonment, a 300,000 to 700,000 Rouble fine, or one to four years' assigned labour.

Several people are facing trial under more than one Criminal Code Article, or part of an Article.

People are on trial in 21 regions of Russia, with the highest number of trials underway – nine – in the Jewish Autonomous Region in the Far East. This is because the regional branch of the FSB security service opened separate cases against most of the Jehovah's Witnesses they were investigating, each of which is heard separately (Jehovah's Witness lawyers have requested that some cases be merged, but Birobidzhan District Court has refused).

(The 93 individuals on trial [are listed here](#).)

No Muslims who read the works of the late Turkish theologian Said Nursi [are known to be on trial](#).

Prosecuted for prayer and hymn singing

Prosecutions of Jehovah's Witnesses are happening despite the Supreme Court judges' noting in both their [initial](#) and [appeal](#) rulings that the Court had not assessed the legality of the means of expression of Jehovah's Witness beliefs. The government also claimed, in a submission to the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) in Strasbourg on 23 March 2018, that the ban "does not contain a restriction or prohibition on individual profession of [Jehovah's Witness] teachings".

Jehovah's Witnesses therefore argue that the Supreme Court's 2017 ban applies to the activities of legal entities, not to the activities of individual believers.

Defence witnesses at the trial of Yury Prokopyevich Savelyov (born 1 January 1954), at Lenin District Court in Novosibirsk, used their courtroom testimony in January 2020 to explain the difference between a legal entity and a group of believers. They pointed out that the right of believers to gather together is protected by the Constitution. Savelyov has been charged under 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").

In Volgograd, Igor Artyomovich Yegozaryan (born 17 January 1965), Sergey Nikolayevich Melnik (born 29 June 1972), Valery Aleksandrovich Rogozin (born 25 March 1962); Vyacheslav Ivanovich Osipov (born 17 October 1970, no longer a Jehovah's Witness), and Denis Petrovich Peresunko (born 11 March 1978, no longer a Jehovah's Witness) are on trial at the city's Tractor Factory District Court under Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 1 (Rogozin, Osipov, and Peresunko also under Article 282.3, Part 1).

At their first hearing on 6 February 2020, prosecutors read out the charges, which included "the performance of religious songs and prayers to their God", according to Jehovah's Witnesses. "If I am accused of praying to God, then I don't understand what is extremist in this, or what prayer has to do with banned organisations," defendant Igor Yegozaryan responded.

Prosecutors in Chelyabinsk also accused Valentina Anatolyevna Suvorova (born 18 January 1948) of deliberately talking to residents about religion, singing hymns, praying, and studying religious literature, "anticipating .. and expecting the onset of socially dangerous consequences in the form of violation of the rights, freedoms and legitimate interests of person and citizen", according to the indictment, cited by Jehovah's Witnesses on 25 December 2019. Suvorova is [on trial at the city's Metallurgical District Court under Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 2 \("Participation in the activity of a social or religious association or other organisation in relation to which a court has adopted a decision legally in force on liquidation or ban on the activity in connection with the carrying out of extremist activity"\)](#).

Forum 18 asked Chelyabinsk Region Prosecutor's Office why it was seeking to punish Suvorova for exercising freedom of religion or belief, who she had harmed through her activity, and whether it was seeking a jail term for her. In his 19 May response, Deputy Prosecutor Yevgeny Salamatov did not answer these questions. He merely stated that the court would decide on her guilt and the form and level of her punishment.

Forum 18 has on several occasions asked investigative bodies and prosecutor's offices why they treat such activities as criminal offences when the Supreme Court itself emphasised that it was not the religion of Jehovah's Witnesses that was prohibited, but the activities of their Administrative Centre and its subdivisions, ie. legal entities. It has never received a response to this question.

Lengthy and complex proceedings

On several occasions, judges have sent cases back to prosecutors because of shortcomings in indictments and evidence. This does not mean, however, that defendants will avoid trial. Prosecutors may repeatedly appeal against such decisions, or may choose to re-work cases and resubmit them to court.

The first case a judge returned to prosecutors was that against Valeriya Aleksandrovna Rayman and her husband Sergey Alekseyevich Rayman, [at Sverdlovsk District Court in Kostroma on 25 September 2019](#). Kostroma Regional Court turned down prosecutors' appeal against this decision on 14 November 2019. They subsequently resubmitted the case, however, which is now being considered by a different judge. Four hearings have been so far postponed, most recently on 8 April 2020.

Lenin District Court in Vladivostok also sent back the [case against six elderly female Jehovah's Witnesses \(and 44-year-old Valentin Osadchuk\)](#) on 12 November 2019. Prosecutors appealed unsuccessfully on 27 January 2020 at Primorye Regional Court, and will appeal again at the 9th Cassational Court in Vladivostok on 1 June 2020.

Yelizovo District Court in Kamchatka returned the case against Konstantin Aleksandrovich Bazhenov (born 24 July 1977), Snezhana Yevgenyevna Bazhenova (born 20 December 1977), and Vera Ivanovna Zolotova (born 20 October 1946) to prosecutors on 14 November 2019, but prosecutors succeeded in having this decision overturned at Kamchatka Regional Court on 9 January 2020. Proceedings therefore resumed on 12 February 2020, after the case was resubmitted.

One trial currently underway is a retrial. On 25 March 2020, Penza Regional Court overturned the convictions of Vladimir Aleksandrovich Alushkin (born 30 June 1964), Tatyana Sergeevna Alushkina (born 12 September 1963), Galiya Anvarovna Olkhova (born 5 February 1970), Denis Vladimirovich Timoshin (born 20 March 1980), Andrey Aleksandrovich Magliv (born 20 June 1984), and Vladimir Aleksandrovich Kulyasov (born 17 April 1974). The Regional Court [ordered that their case be re-examined](#).

Alushkin had been sentenced to six years' imprisonment under 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"). The others had received two-year suspended sentences under Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 2 ("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") at Penza's Lenin District Court on 13 December 2019. The first full hearing in their retrial was due to take place on 14 May 2020, but proceedings have been suspended as "there is no realistic possibility for the accused to participate in proceedings", according to the court website. This is because of the "worsening epidemiological situation in the country", Jehovah's Witnesses stated on 15 May.

On trial again

Stanislav Viktorovich Kim (born 5 July 1968) and Nikolai Yuryevich Polevodov (born 10 February 1970) are facing a second conviction for "continuing the activities" of Jehovah's Witnesses. A judge at Railway District Court in Khabarovsk found them guilty under Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 2 ("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 4 February 2020, and gave them two-year suspended sentences.

The two men are still on trial in a separate case at Khabarovsk's Industrial District Court under Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 1. On trial alongside them are Vitaly Vyacheslavovich Zhuk (born 8 April 1972), and Maya Pavlovna Karpushkina (born 19 March 1949), Svetlana Grigoryevna Sedova (born 8 June 1969), and Tatyana Valentinovna Zhuk (born 13 March 1973), who have all been charged under Part 2.

"The verdict in the first case is definitely reflected in the second," Jehovah's Witnesses told Forum 18 on 19 May. "At the moment, it is difficult to say how strongly .. but in the eyes of the judge they will already be criminals."

The men's concluded trial (case investigated by the Khabarovsk Region FSB security service) ran from October 2019 to February 2020, overlapping entirely with the current trial (case investigated by the Khabarovsk Region Investigative Committee), which had its preliminary hearing in August 2019. This meant that Kim (himself a former Interior Ministry forensic specialist) and Polevodov were scheduled to attend hearings in two courts, sometimes on the same day.

The two men have spent most of this time in detention (82 days and 66 days respectively after their arrest, at a party in a rented cafe on 10 November 2018) or under house arrest (354 days and 201 days respectively). Both men are now on probation as a result of their February 2020 conviction.

"Because of the callous attitude of the authorities, the believers and their families are now forced to suffer doubly unjustly," Jehovah's Witnesses commented on 7 November 2019, when both sets of proceedings were underway.

The concurrent trials caused difficulties for the men's defence team. "It is difficult to defend [people] in two court proceedings at the same time, since you have to prepare for two cases, go to different courts, and go before different judges who react differently to what is happening," Jehovah's Witnesses commented to Forum 18 on 19 May.

Property seizures

As well as the strong possibility of conviction, bringing with it a criminal record and a heavy fine or prison sentence, prosecution and trial can have wider consequences for defendants.

At least 10 people currently on trial have had assets seized, including cars and large sums of money. Courts order this as surety against the possible non-payment of fines imposed in the event of a conviction. If a fine is not paid within the prescribed period, "the process of repossession of seized personal property is launched", Jehovah's Witness lawyers explained to Forum 18 on 8 May. The property is sold, and the proceeds are used to pay off the fine. If the defendant does pay the fine, then the seizure of personal property is cancelled.

Prosecutors in Arkhangelsk had two cars belonging to the family of Yevgeny Viktorovich Yakku (born 22 February 1980) seized on 28 February 2019, "in order to enforce a possible sentence, implying a fine of 3 years' salary or up to 700,000 Roubles", according to Jehovah's Witnesses.

Yakku has been on trial under Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 1, Part 1.1, and Part 2 simultaneously – because he is charged with multiple offences, this means his punishment, if convicted, will be more severe, and he may receive a sentence of up to 15 years' imprisonment, Jehovah's Witnesses told Forum 18 on 8 May.

Yakku's case was transferred for jurisdictional reasons from October District Court to Solombalsky District Court on 19 February 2020. His lawyer challenged this at Arkhangelsk Regional Court on 16 April, but the outcome is unknown.

Other defendants whose property has been seized are:

- in Kemerovo, Aleksandr Iosifovich Bondarchuk (born 13 July 1974) and Sergey Nikolayevich Yavushkin (born 4 August 1960) – cars;
- in Ulyanovsk, Aleksandr Vyacheslavovich Ganin (born 8 January 1957) – a car, Khoren Nikolevich Khachikyan (born 25 April 1985) – a car, Natalya Aleksandrovna Mysina (born 17 December 1971) and Sergey Aleksandrovich Mysin (born 21 June 1965) – half a million Roubles and a car, Andrey Vladimirovich Tabakov (born 23 January 1973) – 600,000 Roubles, Mikhail Grigoryevich Zelensky (born 7 November 1960) – a car;
- in Vladivostok, Valentin Pavlovich Osadchuk (born 15 March 1976) – 26,000 Roubles and a car.

FSB security service officers also [forced doctors to halt Sergey Mysin's treatment in intensive care in an Ulyanovsk hospital in October 2019](#), Jehovah's Witnesses told Forum 18.

A court also ordered the seizure of a car belonging to Svetlana Yakovlevna Monis (born 15 July 1977), who is on trial in Birobidzhan (Jewish Autonomous Region), but Monis managed to regain permission to use the vehicle on appeal.

Financial pressure

Employers have fired from their jobs at least 18 people in 11 regions under pressure from state agencies, Jehovah's Witnesses stated on 23 April. Mostly, however, Jehovah's Witnesses are pressured to resign "of their own free will".

Individuals may also lose their jobs because they have been put in detention or under house arrest, or are prohibited from engaging in certain activities (such as using the internet); even travel restrictions may make it difficult to continue in certain jobs, especially once a trial begins and required regular attendance at court.

Investigators have also had more than 200 Jehovah's Witnesses placed on the Federal Financial Monitoring Service (Rosfinmonitoring) "List of Terrorists and Extremists" – these include people who are still only suspects, as well as those who have been charged and those who are on trial. Inclusion on the List [obliges banks to freeze an individual's accounts, blocking all transactions over 10,000 Roubles](#). This makes it difficult or impossible to receive salaries and pensions.

Jehovah's Witnesses also point out that individuals on the Rosfinmonitoring List have encountered problems registering for benefits, buying phone sim cards, and registering and insuring cars.

On trial despite age, sickness

By Victoria Arnold

Forum 18 (18.05.2020) - <https://bit.ly/3cKQoDz> - Of the 85 Jehovah's Witnesses on trial in 38 cases for "continuing the activities of a banned extremist organisation" for exercising freedom of religion or belief, 85-year-old Yelena Zayshchuk is the oldest. Five fellow defendants in her case are in their sixties or seventies. All face up to six years' imprisonment if convicted. Two defendants in their sixties died in April before trials began.

At least 18 of the 85 Jehovah's Witnesses on trial on charges of "continuing the activities of a banned extremist organisation" for exercising their right to freedom of religion or belief are in their sixties, seventies or eighties. Another defendant died in Kirov in April shortly before the first full hearing was due in his trial. Another man died in Smolensk in April after investigators submitted the case against him to prosecutors and before it reached court. Both those who died were in their sixties.

The oldest defendant is 85-year-old Yelena Zayshchuk, whom the FSB security service took in for questioning after raiding her home in Vladivostok in April 2018. Her family "do not understand why they are persecuting an elderly and sick person who has done nothing wrong to anyone", Jehovah's Witnesses commented (see below).

Among the other six on trial with Zayshchuk is Nina Purge, who is due to be 80 on 19 June. Four of the other defendants are women in their sixties or seventies. The Judge has sent the case back to prosecutors (see below).

Yury Geraskov, who died in Kirov at the age of 64, had not spent any time in detention, but "stress connected with persecution for his faith had negatively affected Yury's health", Jehovah's Witnesses noted (see below).

Viktor Malkov, who died in Smolensk at the age of 61, had spent eight months in detention and nearly four months under house arrest. He had suffered from coronary heart disease and kidney problems. "Viktor's health was largely influenced by poor conditions in pre-trial detention centres and the stress associated with criminal prosecution", Jehovah's Witnesses noted (see below).

Sergey Mysin is on trial in Ulyanovsk despite serious health concerns. Jehovah's Witnesses say he was discharged early from intensive care in October 2019 after FSB security service officers went to the hospital to insist on his treatment being stopped. The Ulyanovsk Region FSB refused to answer any questions from Forum 18 on the incident (see below).

Two of the other defendants are men who have already been convicted in another, overlapping trial (see below).

Despite the coronavirus pandemic, there is no sign of early release, however, for those Jehovah's Witnesses currently in pre-trial detention. Several are worried about the danger of contracting the disease (see below).

The Moscow-based Public Verdict human rights group warns of poor conditions in Russian prisons, such as "overcrowding, poor ventilation, lack of medical staff, poor medical care, and serious health problems, including chronic conditions and lowered immunity among inmates and staff alike" (see below).

38 trials, 85 defendants

Three years after Russia's Supreme Court [ordered the liquidation as "extremist" of all Jehovah's Witness associations in April 2017](#), 85 Jehovah's Witnesses are on trial on charges of "continuing the activities of a banned extremist organisation" for exercising their right to freedom of religion or belief.

If convicted, the defendants could be imprisoned for up to 10 years or be fined up to twice the average yearly salary. Although the majority are at home under house arrest or various lesser restrictions, three men remain in detention, despite the widely acknowledged danger of coronavirus in the overcrowded Russian penitentiary system. The pandemic has led to the postponement of most court hearings (see below).

The 38 trials currently underway involve 31 women and 54 men. Forty-three people are being tried under [Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 1 \("Organisation of the activity of a social or religious association or other organisation in relation to which a court has adopted a decision legally in force on liquidation or ban on the activity in connection with the carrying out of extremist activity"\)](#). This carries a possible punishment of six to 10 years' imprisonment or a fine of 400,000 to 800,000 Roubles.

Forty-one defendants are facing charges under [Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 2 \("Participation in the activity of a social or religious association or other organisation in relation to which a court has adopted a decision legally in force on liquidation or ban on the activity in connection with the carrying out of extremist activity"\)](#). If convicted, they may receive a sentence of two to six years' imprisonment, a fine of 300,000 to 600,000 Roubles, or one to four years' assigned labour.

Prosecutors have also charged three people under [Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 1.1 \("Inclination, recruitment or other involvement of a person in an extremist organisation"\)](#) and 17 people under Criminal Code Article 282.3, Part 1 ("Financing of extremist activity"), some in addition to the charges outlined above.

If a person is convicted under [Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 1.1, the judge may impose a sentence of four to eight years' imprisonment, a 300,000 to 700,000 Rouble fine, or two to five years' assigned labour](#). Criminal Code Article 282.3, Part 1 carries possible punishments of three to eight years' imprisonment, a 300,000 to 700,000 Rouble fine, or one to four years' assigned labour.

Several people are facing trial under more than one Article (or Part of an Article) of the Criminal Code.

(For a list of the 85 individuals on trial, see forthcoming F18News article.)

On 1 April, Igor Ivashin became the [32nd Jehovah's Witness to be convicted of "continuing the activity of an extremist organisation" since the 2017 Supreme Court ban](#).

[Muslims who meet to study the works of late Turkish theologian Said Nursi also face prosecution under Criminal Code Article 282.2, Parts 1 and 2 for "continuing the activities" of "Nurdzhular", a "banned extremist organisation" which Muslims in Russia deny exists](#).

No Muslims who read Nursi's works are known to be on trial. Two are known to be facing criminal prosecution: [Nakiya Sharifullina is under house arrest in Naberezhnyye Chelny in the Republic of Tatarstan, while Ibragim Murtazaliyev from Izberbash in the Republic of Dagestan is in pre-trial detention in Makhachkala's Investigation Prison](#).

Effects of Covid-19 pandemic

All hearings of first-instance Jehovah's Witness cases have been postponed in recent weeks because of the coronavirus pandemic, the Jehovah's Witnesses told Forum 18 on 8 May, although in-person hearings appear to be resuming in some places after the lifting of nationwide lockdown on 12 May. Defendants have still had to appear in court in person for hearings concerning potential changes to their restrictive measures.

After 18 March, as part of Russia's Covid-19 isolation regime, courts were closed to the public and have been operating only a limited schedule of hearings of urgent cases, with all others put off until after isolation measures could be lifted.

According to a Supreme Court decree of 8 April, urgent hearings include decisions on

pre-trial restrictive measures, child protection, and medical intervention. Otherwise, courts are able to decide themselves which hearings are urgent enough to go ahead. The nationwide lockdown ran until 12 May, when regions began introducing their own measures; many courts still appear to be operating under similar restrictions.

Courts have been encouraged to use video-conferencing to consider urgent cases, but this is dependent on individual facilities' technological capacity.

Murmansk Regional Court has postponed Roman Markin and Viktor Trofimov's appeal hearing three times, most recently until 25 May. The men were [fined under Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 1 in January 2020](#).

Igor Ivashin, however, who was given a [six-year suspended sentence on 1 April 2020](#), appeared by video link at his first appeal hearing at the Supreme Court of Yakutiya on 14 May. (The next hearing is due on 21 May.)

Because of the pandemic, police, FSB security police and other agencies have launched fewer raids on homes, Jehovah's Witnesses have told Forum 18. These have not stopped, however, with searches taking place recently in Primorye Region (three addresses on 12 May), Krasnodar Region (nine addresses on 29 April), and Ivanovo Region (four addresses on 15 April).

Forum 18 is aware of only one criminal investigation which has been suspended explicitly because of the risk of coronavirus: that of Tatyana Sholner in Birobidzhan in the Jewish Autonomous Region. Her case has not been closed, however, and she remains under travel restrictions.

There is no sign of early release, however, for those Jehovah's Witnesses currently in pre-trial detention.

Prisons in Russia have long been reported to be [overcrowded, poorly ventilated, and often unsanitary, and pre-trial detention centres are often considered to be worse than the labour camps \(correctional colonies\) in which most people with custodial sentences serve their terms](#).

Still in detention despite virus risk

Of the 85 people on trial, three are currently known to be in detention, despite the risk of infection and human rights activists' calls for pre-trial detainees in Russia to be placed under house arrest or other restrictions to protect them.

A [23 March statement by the Moscow-based Public Verdict](#) human rights group warned of poor conditions in Russian prisons, such as "overcrowding, poor ventilation, lack of medical staff, poor medical care, and serious health problems, including chronic conditions and lowered immunity among inmates and staff alike". This makes prisoners vulnerable to infection and likely to be unable to get adequate medical treatment should they fall ill with Covid-19.

Public Verdict called for prisoners to be freed or measures put in place to protect their health.

On 1 April, the Presidential Council for Human Rights appealed to investigatory bodies, courts, and the prison service to transfer detainees to house arrest. On 6 April, more than 50 human rights activities and cultural figures published an open letter also calling for a move to house arrest for elderly, sick and non-violent prisoners.

The 66-year-old Yury Prokopyevich Savelyov (born 1 January 1954) is on trial at Lenin District Court in Novosibirsk under 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"). He has been held at the city's Investigation Prison No. 1 for nearly 18 months. At his most recent hearing, conducted by video link on 16 April, Judge Yekaterina Kashina again extended his period of detention until 22 July, regardless of Savelyov's concerns over his "unfavourable sanitary-epidemiological situation".

One of Savelyov's cellmates works in the detention centre, bringing him into contact with large numbers of people, and he does not have a mask, gloves or shoe covers, Jehovah's Witnesses stated on 27 April.

Forum 18 wrote to the court on 5 May to ask why Savelyov was not placed under house arrest instead, and what measures are being taken to ensure his safety in detention. Court chairwoman Yelena Fetisova replied on 13 May that the court had, in its decision, taken into account everything relevant to the question of Savelyov's detention, and had had no medical documentation suggesting that it should not be extended. The question of health protection measures in detention was not within the competence of the court, she added. Savelyov appealed unsuccessfully against his extended detention at Novosibirsk Regional Court on 8 May.

Vladimir Aleksandrovich Khokhlov (born 9 April 1977) and Eduard Vladimirovich Zhinzhikov (born 9 November 1971) also remain in detention in Novozybkov (Bryansk Region). Forum 18 wrote to Novozybkov City Court on 12 May to ask why the men's detention had been extended despite the risk of infection. Forum 18 received no reply by the end of the working day on 18 May.

In Rostov-on-Don on 17 April, a judge also extended the detention of Vilen Shagenovich Avanesov, his son Arsen Vilenovich Avanesov, and Aleksandr Mikhailovich Parkov (who are not yet on trial) until 19 May. The detention was extended despite the fact that Parkov has an impaired immune system and 67-year-old Vilen Avanesov is at risk because of his age, according to Jehovah's Witnesses.

Four people currently on trial are under house arrest. Investigators and prosecutors have placed most of the other defendants under specific restrictions (such as night-time curfews and bans on using the internet) or travel restrictions.

Prosecution of the elderly

The criminal trials currently underway include those of some of the oldest people prosecuted for exercising their freedom of religious and belief as Jehovah's Witnesses.

The oldest defendant is Yelena Viktorovna Zayshchuk (born 25 August 1934), whom the FSB security service took in for questioning after raiding her home in Vladivostok in April 2018. Her family "do not understand why they are persecuting an elderly and sick person who has done nothing wrong to anyone". Proceedings against her and her fellow defendants are currently suspended after the judge sent the case back to prosecutors (see forthcoming F18News article).

On trial alongside her at Lenin District Court in Vladivostok are three over-70s – Nina Ivanovna Purge (born 19 June 1940), Lyubov Aleksandrovna Galaktionova (born 14 July 1942), and Raisa Mikhailovna Usanova (born 28 September 1947) – as well as two over-

60s, Nailya Sunatovna Kogay (born 5 October 1951) and Nadezhda Anatolyevna Anoykina (born 11 January 1958).

Zayshchuk, Galaktionova, Kogay and Purge all suffer from poor health, Jehovah's Witnesses note. Being subject to criminal investigation and trial for more than two years has worsened their underlying conditions.

The six women were charged under Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 2 ("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"), and have all been under travel restrictions throughout the investigation. A seventh defendant, Valentin Pavlovich Osadchuk (born 15 March 1976), was charged under Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 1 for allegedly organising the association, and spent 278 days in detention and 77 days under house arrest after his arrest on 19 April 2018. He was then released under travel restrictions on 5 April 2019.

All seven defendants have, since 25 July 2018, been on the Federal Financial Monitoring Service (Rosfinmonitoring) "List of Terrorists and Extremists", [whose assets banks are obliged to freeze \(although small transactions are permitted\)](#). Zayshchuk remains the oldest person on the entire List.

Forum 18 wrote to the Primorye Region Prosecutor's Office before the start of the working day of 13 May 2020, asking whether it is seeking custodial sentences for these elderly defendants and if so, why. Forum 18 received no reply by the end of the Vladivostok working day of 18 May.

Valentina Anatolyevna Suvorova was born on 18 January 1948. She made her first appearance at Metallurgical District Court in Chelyabinsk under Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 2 ("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 3 March 2020, when 40 other Jehovah's Witnesses turned up to support her, but subsequent hearings have been postponed because of the Covid-19 isolation regime.

Suvorova remains under travel restrictions and has not spent time in detention. After three postponements, her next hearing is due to take place on 3 June.

Officers armed with guns and sledgehammers raided Suvorova's home and several others in and around Chelyabinsk on 26 March 2019. They did not arrest Suvorova and her husband at the time, but Jehovah's Witnesses quoted Suvorova as stating the experience caused her "incurable emotional trauma, additional stress, and poor health", including sleep problems, anxiety, and tachycardia (a heart condition with faster than normal heart beats which can be dangerous). Investigators charged her on 5 December 2019 and opened a separate case against her 74-year-old husband, Vladimir Nikolayevich Suvorov, on 16 January 2020. He remains a suspect.

According to the indictment, quoted by Jehovah's Witnesses on 25 December 2019, Suvorova stands accused of deliberately talking to Chelyabinsk residents about religion, singing hymns, praying, and studying religious literature, while "anticipating .. and expecting the onset of socially dangerous consequences in the form of violation of the rights, freedoms and legitimate interests of person and citizen".

Forum 18 wrote to Chelyabinsk Region Prosecutor's Office before the start of the working day of 13 May 2020, asking whether it is seeking a custodial sentences for Suvorova and if so, why. Forum 18 received no reply by the end of the Chelyabinsk working day of 18

May.

Two other over-70s are known to be currently on trial: Vera Ivanovna Zolotova (born 20 October 1946) in Yelizovo in Kamchatka; and Maya Pavlovna Karpushkina (born 19 March 1949) in Khabarovsk.

FSB forcibly ends hospital intensive care treatment?

Sergey Aleksandrovich Mysin (born 21 June 1965) is on trial at Lenin District Court in Ulyanovsk. Although he had health problems before his prosecution began, they have since worsened with the stress of the investigation and trial, especially when he was in detention for 55 days after his arrest on 27 February 2019 (this was followed by house arrest, then travel restrictions).

Mysin's condition deteriorated in October 2019. He was taken to hospital on 14 October and to intensive care two days later, but Jehovah's Witnesses say he was discharged early on 21 October after FSB security service officers went to the hospital to insist that doctors halt his treatment. He is now at home and remains in poor health, the Jehovah's Witnesses told Forum 18 on 8 May. It did not confirm any details of his illness.

The Ulyanovsk Region FSB refused to answer any questions from Forum 18 on whether and, if so, why its officers had visited the hospital and ordered doctors to halt urgent treatment. "Send an official request for information," the officer – who did not give his name – told Forum 18 on 18 May.

Health problems, deaths

Many other Jehovah's Witnesses who have suffered raids on their homes, arrest, interrogation, detention, and lengthy trials have reported a deteriorating state of health. This has included both the exacerbation of existing conditions and the onset of new problems. In two cases, death has followed before full trials began.

Yury Mikhailovich Geraskov (born 12 January 1956) died on 24 April 2020, shortly before the first full hearing in his trial was due to take place at Pervomaysky District Court in Kirov. He and another six Jehovah's Witnesses had been charged under 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"), and Criminal Code Article 282.3, Part 1 ("Financing of extremist activity").

Although [Geraskov had not spent any time in detention](#), "stress connected with persecution for his faith had negatively affected Yury's health", Jehovah's Witnesses commented on 27 April 2020.

It is currently unknown when court hearings will now take place for Geraskov's fellow defendants: Maksim Valeryevich Khalturin (born 3 September 1974); Vladimir Aleksandrovich Korobeynikov (born 14 December 1952); Andrzej [Anatolyevich] Oniszcuk (born 3 October 1968; a Polish citizen and the only foreigner currently facing prosecution); Andrey Sergeevich Suvorkov (born 26 February 1993); Yevgeny Anatolyevich Suvorkov (born 3 February 1978); and Vladimir Petrovich Vasilyev (born 22 November 1956).

Another Jehovah's Witness has died after investigators submitted the case against him to prosecutors and before it reached court. Viktor Ivanovich Malkov (born 21 February 1959) died in Smolensk on 26 April 2020, [having spent eight months in detention and](#)

[nearly four months under house arrest](#). He had suffered from coronary heart disease and kidney problems.

"Viktor's health was largely influenced by poor conditions in pre-trial detention centres and the stress associated with criminal prosecution", the Jehovah's Witnesses stated after his death.

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14.05.20 - The colony administration increased pressure on Dennis Christensen, trying to prevent him from going free

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2020/05/7.html>

At the Lgov colony, where Dennis Christensen, one of Jehovah's Witnesses, is serving his term for faith, administrators imposed numerous absurd penalties on him to block the paying of a fine in lieu of unserved time. For example, one of the supposed "violations" was "sleeping at the time that was not set according to the daily routine." .

[Continue reading...](#)

13.05.20 - Persecution sinks to a new level: Feliks Makhammadiyev became the first of Jehovah's Witnesses forced to stateless-person status

Link to full text in Russian : <https://jw-russia.org/news/2020/05/6.html>

On May 8, 2020, it was learned that Russian citizenship of Saratov resident Feliks Makhammadiyev, who had suffered a brutal beating in a colony of Orenburg, was annulled after his 18 years of living legally in this country. In fact, Russia violates his fundamental right to citizenship, which is entrenched in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Feliks Makhammadiyev was born in a family of law enforcement officials in Uzbekistan. As a minor, he moved to Saratov. There he became a citizen of Russia.

[Continue reading...](#)

13.05.20 - Jehovah's Witness charged in Russian Far East

Link to full text in Russian:

<https://www.interfax-russia.ru/far-east/news/predpolagaemyy-lider-yacheyki-zapreshchennyh-v-rf-svideteley-iegovy-stal-figurantom-ugolovnogo-dela-v-primore>

A criminal case was opened in Primorie against a 49-year-old man, who is suspected of arranging the activity of the Jehovah's Witnesses, which are forbidden in Russia.

"The man is suspected of committing the crime under part 1 of article 282.2 of the Criminal Code of the RF (arranging the activity of an extremist organization)," the website of the Investigative Department of the S.K.R. for Primorie territory reports.

[Continue reading...](#)

13.05.20 - Russia uses new form of persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses

Link to full text in Russian:

<https://nversia.ru/news/osuzhdenenogo-za-ekstremizm-chlena-zapreshchennoy-v-rf-organizacii-svideteli-iegovy-iz-saratova-lishili-rossiyskogo-grazhdanstva/>

Feliks Makhammadiev, a resident of Saratov who is a member of the extremist religious organization of Jehovah's Witnesses (which is forbidden in Russia), has been deprived of Russian citizenship. This was reported by news media, citing the European association of the religious organization. Now Feliks Makhammadiev, who was found guilty of extremism (article 282.2 of the CC RF), is serving his sentence in the Orenburg penal colony.

[Continue reading...](#)

12.05.20 - In the Primorye Territory, new searches of Jehovah's Witnesses. According to preliminary data, one person is detained

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2020/05/5.html>

On May 12, 2020, at least three homes of local Jehovah's Witnesses were searched in the town of Lesozavodsk. Sergey Kobelev, 44, was detained. Details are being clarified.

[Continue reading...](#)

07.05.20 - Dennis Christensen has served over half his sentence for faith. The law allows his release, but the Court ignores the motions

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2020/05/4.html>

On April 24, 2020, at the age of 64, Kirov resident Yuriy Geraskov died of a long illness. He was one of Jehovah's Witnesses. The investigator knew about the health condition of the believer, but did not stop the criminal prosecution. Stress from searches and interrogations negatively affected Yuriy's well-being.

[Continue reading...](#)

06.05.20 - In the spring of 1945, Russia freed Jehovah's Witnesses from concentration camps. Why, 75 years later, are they again in prisons?

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2020/05/3.html>

More than 4,000 prisoners of concentration camps wore purple triangles on their chests. Because of their faith, they refused to salute Hitler, pick up weapons and fight. On the 75th anniversary of the liberation, the peace-loving Jehovah's Witnesses are again in prison, this time in Russia. How did the liberating country become an oppressor?

[Continue reading...](#)

04.05.20 - Three months passed after the beating of five believers in the Orenburg Colony. What is happening to them now?

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2020/05/2.html>

According to data on May 4, 2020, Feliks Makhmadiyev, who had a damaged lung, is recovering in the prison hospital; the threat to life has passed. Believers Budenchuk, Miretskiy, Gridasov and German also report feeling better. They are forced to work ten hours a day.

[Continue reading...](#)

Prosecutions against Muslim organizations and believers

Misuse of the anti-extremism laws in April

Sova-Center (08.05.2020) - <https://bit.ly/2Lw9jGh> - It was reported in April that Gabdrakhman (Albert) Naumov, a teacher at the Russian Islamic University and a well-known religious activist in Tatarstan, was arrested there in March 2020 under Article 282.2 Part 1 of the Criminal Code (organizing activities of an extremist organization). He was accused of organizing a local cell of Nurcular, a religious organization recognized as extremist; Naumov denies any guilt. The ban on Nurcular in 2008 resulted from the unjustified bans against the books of moderate Islamic Turkish theologian Said Nursi, which were found to promote the superiority of Islam over other religions. Russian Muslims studying the Nursi legacy do not constitute a single organization, but this did not prevent law enforcement agencies and courts from recognizing an association, which never existed in reality, as extremist and from prosecuting Muslims who read and discuss Nursi's books under Article 282.2 of the Criminal Code for participation in a banned organization.

In April, we recorded two cases filed under Article 20.29 of the Code of Administrative Offenses (mass distribution of extremist materials) for the dissemination of religious literature without a proper reason, both in Bashkortostan.

The Baymaysky District court fined local resident Zilya Mukhametzyanova a thousand rubles under Article 20.29. On her VKontakte page, she shared a publication that included a number of files with Islamic literature, including a file with The Book of Monotheism by Muhammad ibn Sulayman at-Tamimi (Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab) with comments by theologian Abdul-Rahman ibn Nasir al-Sa'di. This treatise as well as its

various editions with al-Sa'di commentaries were recognized as extremist by courts in several Russian regions on a number of occasions. In our opinion, although the text of the treatise contains certain elements of hate speech and a number of positive references to jihad, the modern standards cannot be applied to 18th century religious works; al-Sa'di's comments on The Book of Monotheism contain no aggressive statements. Thus, we view both the ban against the distribution of the treatise and the prosecution against Mukhametzyanova as inappropriate.

The Abzelilovsky District Court of Bashkortostan fined Aigiz Asylguzhin fifteen hundred rubles under Article 20.29 of the Code of Administrative Offenses; he was also warned about the impermissibility of violations against the legislation on countering extremist activities. Miracles of the Quran - a video recognized as extremist in 2011 - was found on his VKontakte page. In our opinion, Miracles of the Quran is a clearly non-aggressive movie and was recognized as extremist inappropriately. Accordingly, the fine imposed on Asylguzhin was inappropriate as well.

Special Bimonthly FORB Digest (16-30.04.2020)

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01.05.20 - The Krasnodar FSB, together with the Cossacks, raided believers in two villages. Bibles and electronic devices seized.

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2020/05/1.html>

In the morning of April 29, 2020, groups of armed security forces invaded at least seven homes of residents of Pavlovskaya and Kholmanskaya villages for searches and interrogations, exposing believers to the risk of infection during the pandemic. A 62-year-old believer was taken to Krasnodar for interrogation, and a written recognizance not to leave the place was taken.

[Continue reading...](#)

28.04.20 - In Smolensk, Viktor Malkov, 61, died suddenly. Released after eight months in pre-trial detention, he succumbed before court date.

Link to full text in Russian : <https://jw-russia.org/news/2020/04/16.html>

On April 26, 2020, a year after his arrest, one of Jehovah's Witnesses from Smolensk, Viktor Malkov, died. Before the criminal case, he worked as a driver, helped an elderly mother and a disabled brother, was a loving husband and a reliable friend. For his faith, Victor spent eight months in a pre-trial detention center and three months under house arrest. This undermined Viktor Malkov's already poor health.

[Continue reading...](#)

27.04.20 - Orthodox church leadership suffering from COVID-19

Link to full text in Russian: <https://credo.press/230592/>

The Russian Orthodox Church (RPTs) is experiencing the most unexpected and unpleasant period in its modern history. Hundreds of its clergymen and monastics are ill with the new "fashionable" sickness, and several of its regular staff members have already died. Among them are the rector and archdeacon of the former main cathedral of the church, in Elokhovo.

[Continue reading...](#)

27.04.20 - Yuriy Geraskov, a 64-year-old believer, died a week before he could appear in court. He spent the last year of his life as a defendant for faith

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2020/04/15.html>

On April 24, 2020, at the age of 64, Kirov resident Yuriy Geraskov died of a long illness. He was one of Jehovah's Witnesses. The investigator knew about the health condition of the believer, but did not stop the criminal prosecution. Stress from searches and interrogations negatively affected Yuriy's well-being.

[Continue reading...](#)

27.04.20 - Believers are denied transfer from overcrowded pre-trial detention centers, despite the increased risk of COVID-19

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2020/04/14.html>

As of April 24, 2020, 23 believers, including two women, await trial in detention centers in 12 regions of Russia. None are accused of violent acts. Nevertheless, all of the applications to transfer them to house arrest in view of the COVID-19 pandemic were denied.

[Continue reading...](#)

22.04.20 - 'The Father has everything under control.' Yuriy Savelyev tells of life in jail and nearly 5,000 letters from around the world

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2020/04/12.html>

Yuriy Savelyev, a 66-year-old resident of Novosibirsk, has been detained for almost a year and a half. In prison, he faced humiliation, poor health, and the threat of contracting coronavirus, but in those trials he felt God's support.

[Continue reading...](#)

20.04.20 - Citizen complaint about church people not observing lockdown precautions

Link to full text in Russian: <https://novayagazeta.ru/news/2020/04/20/160844>

A resident of Perm, Ekaterina Goncharova-Forsiuk, complained to Rospotrebnadzor, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and the Investigative Committee about an Easter service that was conducted in the church of All Saints.

[Continue reading...](#)

17.04.20 - The court ruled to release Nikolay Kuzichkin after a six-month ordeal to survive without proper treatment

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2020/04/11.html>

On April 16, 2020, the Krasnodar Regional Court decided to move 69-year-old Sochi resident Nikolay Kuzichkin from the pre-trial detention center to house arrest. The believer has been in custody for almost six months.

[Continue reading...](#)

16.04.20 - New raids in Teykovo: security forces put young and old witnesses at mortal risk in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2020/04/10.html>

On April 15, 2020, four days after the first wave of raids on the homes of Jehovah's Witnesses in the town of Teykovo, at least three more families reported intrusion by interrogators. For example, 79-year-old Galina Nosach was questioned about her translation of the Bible and whether her fellow believers came to visit her.

[Continue reading...](#)

15.04.20 - Another handful of Jehovah's Witnesses to be tried for mere attendance at meetings

Link to full text in Russian: http://www.rapsinews.ru/judicial_news/20200415/305717401.html

The Zsviazh district court of Ulianovsk will consider a criminal case against six members of the religious organization of Jehovah's Witnesses, which is illegal in Russia, the press service of the Russian prosecutor general's office reports.

[Continue reading...](#)

Mass raids, new arrests on "extremism" charges

By Victoria Arnold

Forum 18 (09.04.2020) - <https://bit.ly/2yjjE4J> - Police raided 20 Muslim women's homes in Naberezhnyye Chelny in Tatarstan. One woman suffered a heart attack and was placed in intensive care. A court ordered two months' house arrest for 62-year-old Nakiya Sharifullina as she is investigated on criminal "extremism" charges for meeting to study theologian Said Nursi's works. A Dagestan court ordered two months' pre-trial detention for Ibragim Murtazaliyev as he is investigated on similar charges.

At least two more Muslims are facing criminal prosecution for studying the writings of Turkish theologian Said Nursi. The 62-year-old Nakiya Sharifullina is under house arrest in Naberezhnyye Chelny in the Republic of Tatarstan for two months. The 53-year-old Ibragim Murtazaliyev from Izberbash in the Republic of Dagestan has been placed in pre-trial detention in Makhachkala's Investigation Prison for two months.

Both Sharifullina and Murtazaliyev are being investigated under Criminal Code Article 282.2 ("Organisation of" or "Participation in the activities of a banned extremist organisation"), accused of being members of "Nurdzhular", the existence of which Muslims in Russia deny (see below).

It appears likely that more people will soon be charged or named as suspects in the Tatarstan case, as more than 20 were questioned after mass searches of their homes in March. One woman, Alsu Khusayenova, is in hospital after suffering a heart attack (see below).

These are the first arrests of Muslims who read Nursi's works since August 2018, when FSB security service officers detained Denis Vladimirovich Zhukov on board the Moscow-Krasnoyarsk train. Zhukov's case was later [dropped before reaching court](#).

Prosecutors have also closed the only other ongoing Nursi-related case, [against Yevgeny Igoryevich Sukharev, also from Krasnoyarsk Region](#).

Jehovah's Witnesses also continue to experience raids on their homes, arrests and interrogation, often leading to prosecution, after the Supreme Court declared their Administrative Centre to be an "extremist organisation" and [outlawed its activities in 2017](#).

Agencies including the Investigative Committee, the FSB security service, the police, and the National Guard have carried out 879 searches to date, Jehovah's Witnesses state. Prosecutors have charged 349 people under Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 1, Article 282.2, Part 2, and (less commonly) Article 282.3, Part 1 ("Financing of extremist activity").

On 1 April, Igor Ivashin [became the 32nd Jehovah's Witness convicted of "continuing the activity of an extremist organisation" since the 2017 Supreme Court ban](#).

This is despite the fact that the Supreme Court judges themselves insisted that their ruling did not prohibit the religion of the Jehovah's Witnesses, only the activities of its legal entities. Jehovah's Witnesses argue that this means that they should continue to be permitted to pray, sing hymns, and read the Bible together with fellow believers in their homes.

"Extremism" ruling, ban on meetings, prosecutions

Muslims who read Said Nursi's works tend to meet in homes to study Islam, with one or more expounding on the theologian's writings. They also pray, eat and drink tea together. The authorities interpret such meetings as organised activity by "Nurdzhular", aimed at inciting hatred in society and undermining the constitutional order.

"Nurdzhular" (derived from the Turkish for "Nursi followers") was ruled "extremist" and outlawed by the Supreme Court in 2008, despite the fact that Muslims in Russia say that such an association has never existed. No centralised or local religious organisation associated with Nursi's teachings was registered in Russia before the ban – this is unlike the situation of the Jehovah's Witnesses, who had 396 officially registered legal entities before the Supreme Court's 2017 ban came into force.

Many Russian translations of Nursi's books [have been outlawed, both before and since the prohibition on "Nurdzhular", despite their not calling for violence or the violation of human rights.](#)

On 28 August 2018, the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) in Strasbourg found ([Application Nos. 1413/08 and 28621/11](#)) that Russian bans on Nursi's works violated Article 10 ("Freedom of expression") of the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. All ECtHR judgments require states to take steps to prevent similar violations from happening, for example by changing laws and state practices. This process is supervised by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe.

After the 2008 ban, people who have met to study Nursi's books have been prosecuted under Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 1 or Part 2 ("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").

Prisoners of conscience and former prisoners

Seven [Jehovah's Witnesses - from Saratov and Oryol - are currently jailed for their exercise of freedom of religion and belief.](#)

[Some of the Jehovah's Witnesses have been tortured.](#)

Two Muslim men who read Nursi's works are currently known to be serving jail sentences – [Artur Abdulgamidovich Kaltuyev, who received a three-year term in November 2017,](#) and [Ilgar Vagif-ogly Aliyev, sentenced to eight years in June 2018.](#)

Four Muslim readers of Nursi's works have been released from prison within the last year:

- [Sukhrab Abdulgamidovich Kaltuyev and Ziyavdin Badirsoltanovich Dapayev, jailed with Artur Kaltuyev in November 2017 to three and four years respectively;](#)
- [Komil Olimovich Odilov, who received a two-year term in June 2018;](#)
- and [Yevgeny Lvovich Kim, who was given three years and nine months' imprisonment in June 2017.](#)

Kim was released on 10 April 2019, but was [deprived of his Russian citizenship, left stateless, and – on the day he completed his prison term – fined and ordered deported to Uzbekistan, his country of birth.](#) As of early April 2020, he remains in a temporary detention centre for foreign nationals in Khabarovsk, awaiting deportation to Uzbekistan.

Aliyev, Dapayev, both Kaltuyev brothers, Odilov, and Kim all remain on the Federal Financial Monitoring Service (Rosfinmonitoring) "List of Terrorists and Extremists", [whose assets banks are obliged to freeze \(although small transactions are permitted\).](#)

Sabirzhon Shamsidinovich Kabirzoda also appears on the list; a court in Krasnoyarsk [handed him a two-year suspended sentence in August 2018.](#)

Naberezhnyye Chelny: One under house arrest, one in hospital

Police and officers of other agencies raided the homes of twenty Muslim women in Naberezhnyye Chelny in late March, seizing their phones and computers. Alsu Khusayenova suffered a heart attack during the search of her home and was placed in intensive care. Investigators are waiting for her to be released from hospital before arresting and charging her, a fellow Muslim who is following the case told Forum 18 on 8 April.

One of those whose homes were searched, Nakiya Khametzakirovna Sharifullina (born 1 January 1958), is now a suspect in a criminal case opened on 24 March by the Tatarstan Republic Investigative Committee under 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").

According to court documents, seen by Forum 18, another case has been opened against "unidentified persons" under Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 2 ("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 25 March 2020, Judge Rustem Galimullin of Naberezhnyye Chelny City Court upheld investigators' and prosecutors' request that Sharifullina should be placed under house arrest for two months until 24 May 2020.

During this period, Sharifullina is not allowed to leave her flat except to go for a daily walk between 12.00 and 14.00, as requested by her lawyer, to seek any necessary medical treatment, and to participate in the criminal case as required by investigators. She may not send or receive post, may not use the telephone or the internet, and may not otherwise contact anyone except for her lawyer, the probation authorities, investigators, the prosecutor's office, the court, or emergency services. Any meetings with her lawyer must take place at her home.

According to the house arrest ruling, seen by Forum 18, Sharifullina and others "studied the works of Said Nursi, [and] thereby joined the ranks of the religious association 'Nurdzhular'", "knowing that [Nurdzhular's] activities .. have been recognised as extremism and prohibited, disseminating the goals and objectives of this association, [which consist] of the formation of groups of people with a positive attitude to death, combined with being prepared to sacrifice oneself in the name of the teachings, which creates favourable conditions for the formation of a resource base for other extremist or terrorist organisations using Islamic rhetoric".

Sharifullina stands accused of organising a "madrassah", which met in several flats in Naberezhnyye Chelny on a range of dates in March and April 2019, as well as on "other days" since 2017. Investigators say that members of the group studied the Koran and the Turkish language, as well as Nursi's "Risale-i Nur" (Messages of Light) collection, his "Letters", and "A way to positive service" (all on the Justice Ministry's Federal List of Extremist Materials).

Sharifullina has not yet been formally charged and her name does not appear on the

Rosfinmonitoring "List of Terrorists and Extremists". It is unknown when her case will come to trial, though it is likely to be heard at Naberezhnyye Chelny City Court.

Forum 18 wrote to the Tatarstan Republic Prosecutor's Office before the start of the working day on 8 April, asking why Sharifullina was considered dangerous and whether anyone else was subject to prosecution. No reply has been received by the afternoon of the working day of 9 April. Telephones at the Tatarstan Republic Investigative Committee went unanswered when Forum 18 called to enquire about the case on 9 April.

Naberezhnyye Chelny: Earlier prosecutions

On 19 March 2014, a magistrate's court in Naberezhnyye Chelny [found Nakiya Sharifullina guilty under Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 1, also on charges of organising an "underground madrassah" for women to study Nursi's writings, which prosecutors interpreted as a "Nurdzhular cell"](#). The court fined her 100,000 Roubles. Her fellow defendant in the case, Laura Yuryevna Khapinova, was fined 50,000 Roubles under Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 2.

Fellow Naberezhnyye Chelny Muslims Inur Khalilovich Khafizov and Fidail Kanifovich Salimzyanov [were also tried in 2014 for allegedly "continuing the activities" of "Nurdzhular" – Khafizov was fined 100,000 Roubles under Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 1, and Salimzyanov 50,000 Roubles under Article 282.2, Part 2.](#)

Both the 2014 prosecutions also [resulted in confiscated books being burned.](#)

Sharifullina, Khapinova and Salimzyanov lodged appeals against their convictions at the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) in 2014 (Application Nos. 45334/14, 69385/14, and 68231/14 respectively). The Court merged their applications with other Nursi-related appeals and sought the Russian government's response on 31 August 2017. Both the government and applicants have since submitted their observations, but there has been no further progress, the Court press office told Forum 18 on 3 April 2020.

Izberbash: One in detention

FSB security service officers conducted a series of house searches in the town of Izberbash on Dagestan's Caspian Sea coast on 17 March 2020. They then detained and interrogated Ibragim Abdulzhalilovich Murtazaliyev (born 11 July 1966) and Ziyavdin Badirsoltanovich Dapayev (born 12 May 1982). They released Dapayev after questioning, but had Murtazaliyev placed in pre-trial detention for two months in the Dagestani capital, Makhachkala.

It is unknown whether Murtazaliyev has been charged or remains a suspect, or whether he is being investigated under Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 1 or Article 282.2, Part 2.

Murtazaliyev had previously been a witness in the case against Ilgar Vagif-ogly Aliyev, who [received the longest known custodial sentence for a reader of Nursi's works in May 2018](#), and in the first case against Dapayev in 2010.

Investigators confiscated the men's phones and computers and planted religious literature in their homes, according to a fellow Muslim who is following the case. During questioning, Dapayev refused to give evidence against Murtazaliyev, despite his interrogators threatening him with a return to prison for "violating" his probation, the Muslim added.

Dapayev was released from prison in April 2019 after serving one year and five months of a four-year sentence [also imposed for alleged "Nurdzhular" activity.](#)

Dapayev had spent 20 months in an investigation prison in Makhachkala before his trial; a retroactive law which came into force in June 2018 reduces custodial sentences by one and half days for every day spent in pre-trial detention. He remains, however, under administrative supervision (which will last for eight years), meaning that he must abide by a range of restrictions, such as a night-time curfew.

Forum 18 wrote to the Dagestan Republic Prosecutor's Office, the Dagestan Republic Investigative Committee, and the Dagestan branch of the FSB before the start of the working day of 8 April, asking what exactly Murtazaliyev did which served as grounds for his detention and prosecution, in what way he was considered dangerous, and whether a criminal case had been opened against anyone else.

The Investigative Committee told Forum 18 on 8 April that questions should be directed to the FSB. Neither the FSB nor the Prosecutor's Office had responded to Forum 18's enquiries by the afternoon of the working day in Dagestan on 9 April.

Murtazaliyev's name was added to the Rosfinmonitoring "List of Terrorists and Extremists" on 1 April 2020.

Murtazaliyev's address in detention is:
367012
Respublika Dagestan
g. Makhachkala
ulitsa Levina, 45
Sledstvenniy Izolator No. 1

Special Bimonthly FORB Digest (01-15.04.2020)

14.04.20 - Series of searches in the Ivanovo Region. Security officials seek evidence of Jehovah's Witnesses activity

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2020/04/9.html>

Early in the morning on Saturday, April 11, 2020, in the midst of quarantine due to the coronavirus pandemic, in the city of Teykovo, Ivanovo Region, security forces invaded the apartments of four believers' families, exposing them to the risk of contracting a deadly disease. This time there were no detentions, but electronic devices and personal belongings were seized from believers.

[Continue reading...](#)

14.04.20 - Jehovah's Witnesses are searched despite pandemic lock-down

Link to full text in Russian : <https://7x7-journal.ru/news/2020/04/14/v-ivanovskoj-oblasti-proshli-obyski-u-svidetelej-iegovy>

In Taikovo of Ivanovo oblast, security forces arrived for searches in four families of adherents of Jehovah's Witnesses. This was reported on 14 April on the website of devotees of this confession.

[Continue reading...](#)

13.04.20 - Antisemitic incident in north of Russia

Link to full text in Russian:

<http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=74685>

The Jewish cultural center "North Star" in Arkhangelsk was set on fire in the night of Sunday-Monday. An investigation is under way, the press service of the regional department of the emergency ministry reported.

[Continue reading...](#)

11.04.20 - Baptists cry out for federal intervention against scapegoating

Link to full text in Russian:

<https://baptist.org.ru/news/main/view/article/1546296?fbclid=IwAR0tnF43coG1GullWtFXVPudecUjum7sRLLk60tFKGGoseNTC2OJ5J5vUA>

In the name of the centralized religious organization "Russian Union of Evangelical Christians-Baptists" (hereafter RSEKhB) I express my concern about the fact that against the backdrop of social tension, public statements of several officials and journalists are leading to tension within the nation, inciting inter-religious strife, and, as a consequence, to attempts to commit terrorist acts.

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08.04.20 - Nikolay Makhlichev will not be extradited to Russia. He was released from Belarusian pre-trial detention center

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2020/04/8.html>

On April 7, 2020, the General Prosecutor's Office of the Republic of Belarus refused to extradite Nikolay Makhlichev to the Russian Federation, where a criminal case awaited him on the grounds of religion. On the same day, he was released from the Vitebsk pre-trial detention center after being detained there since the end of February. He was released a few hours before the beginning of the Lord's Supper.

[Continue reading...](#)

08.04.20 - Envelope inscribed "Bible Quiz": Igor Ivashin, sentenced to six years' probation, will receive back material evidence of his 'crime' sentencing of Jehovah's Witness set for Tuesday

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2020/04/7.html>

The April 1st verdict to the believer - a husband and father of two children - provides a list of material evidence by which one can judge the nature of his 'crime': "Religious cards; religious games; envelope with religious pictures; Bible domino; folder with Bible comics; box with postcards."

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06.04.20 - Little victims of big injustice. Children of Jehovah's Witnesses are detained, interrogated, humiliated

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2020/04/6.html>

Since 2016, at least 18 cases of harassment of the children of Jehovah's Witnesses have been recorded in various regions of Russia. Five such episodes occurred in January 2020.

[Continue reading...](#)

03.04.2020 - In Belarus, Human Rights groups protest plan to extradite Nikolay Makhalichev to Russia, where he faces persecution for faith

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2020/04/5.html>

On March 16, 2020, the Prosecutor General's Office of Russia sent Belarus a request for the extradition of Russian citizen Nikolai Makhalichev, 36, who is accused of erroneous religious views in his homeland.

[Continue reading...](#)

03.04.20 - 20 whole families of Jehovah's Witnesses face prosecution

Link to full text in Russian: <https://www.zaprava.ru/fsb-saxalina-vozbudila-ugolovnye-dela-protiv-semi-svidetelej-iegovy/>

On 20 March 2020, in Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk, agents of the F.S.B. opened criminal cases against a family of Jehovah's Witnesses (an organization considered extremist in the RF). As jw-russia reports, an investigator of the investigation department of the F.S.B. directorate, D. Melnikov, opened a criminal case on the basis of part 2 of article 282.2 of the CC RF (organizing an extremist community) against a local resident, Tatiana Kulakova. Earlier criminal cases had been opened against her son and husband also.

[Continue reading...](#)

02.04.2020 - On Sakhalin, criminal cases for faith have been opened against parents and the eldest son. The youngest son defends the right to ACS in courts

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2020/04/4.html>

On March 20, 2020, the investigator D. Melnikov opened another criminal case under Part 2 of Article 282.2 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation against local resident Tatyana Kulakova.

[Continue reading...](#)

02.04.2020 - Khanty-Mansiysk Court of appeal finds unlawful hospitalization of a believer in a psychiatric clinic

Link to the full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2020/04/3.html>

On March 5, 2020, the Court of the Khanty-Mansiysk Autonomous Okrug-Yugra canceled the decision of the Surgut City Court judge on referring Timofey Zhukov to a 30-day psychiatric examination in Yekaterinburg.

[Continue reading...](#)

02.04.2020 - A criminal case for faith reopened against the already convicted residents of Karpinsk. A series of searches took place

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2020/04/2.html>

On March 30, 2020, in Karpinsk, security forces again searched the homes of Venera Dulova and her daughter, Daria, as well as Alexander Pryanikov. All had received conditional sentences in late January on charges of extremism

[Continue reading...](#)

02.04.2020 - In Yakutia, a judge sentenced a father of two children to six years' probation for believing in Jehovah

Link to full text in Russia: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2020/04/1.html>

On April 1, 2020, the judge of the Lensk District Court of the Republic of Yakutia, Zhanna Schmidt, sentenced Igor Ivashin, 43, to six years in prison, conditionally, for believing in Jehovah God and discussing the Bible. Ivashin called the accusations of extremism far-fetched: There is no evidence in the case and no victim.

[Continue reading...](#)

Jehovah's Witness will not be extradited from Belarus to Russia

Russian News Service (08.04.2020) - <https://bit.ly/2VmVyOo> - Nikolai Makhlichev was released on 7 April, BelaPAN was told by the coordinator of action for defense of human rights of foreign citizens and persons without citizenship of the organization Human Constanta, Enira Bronitskaia.

She said that Makhlichev plans to get the status of a refugee in Belarus, for which he applied on the day of his arrest, 21 February 2020, in Gorodok (Vitebsk oblast).

Bronitskaia reported that the man was arrested because he was on an international wanted list at Russia's request. Mikhlichev was put into SIZO No. 2 in Vitebsk, where he spent more than 40 days, and documents were requested from Russian law enforcement

agencies, on the basis of which the office of prosecutor general of Belarus made its decision.

As the representative of Human Constanta noted, Makhlichev maintains that he did not know about the opening in January 2019 of a criminal case against him for arranging and financing the activity of an extremist organization, which the Jehovah's Witnesses were ruled to be, back in 2017. In Russia, Makhlichev would face a trial and imprisonment of up to 15 years.

Since 2017, more than 100 adherents of the community have been convicted in various regions. In Belarus, one religious association of Jehovah's Witnesses and 27 congregations are registered with the commissioner for affairs of religions and nationalities. They conduct their congresses in the country without hindrance.

CRIMEA: Prosecuting worship as "illegal missionary activity"

By Felix Corley

Forum 18 (07.04.2020) - <https://bit.ly/2JSIScY> - Prosecutors in Alushta brought a case against Imam Yusuf Ashirov on 1 April of conducting "illegal missionary activity" by leading Friday prayers. Imam Dilyaver Khalilov faces a similar case after police and plain clothes officials raided the mosque just after Friday prayers. A Simferopol court similarly fined Imam Rasim Dervishev. "It is absurd to require anyone to ask permission to conduct religious rituals," his lawyer Ayder Azamatov insists.

In one of three such cases so far in 2020, Prosecutors in Russian-occupied Crimea are pursuing an administrative case over "illegal missionary activity" to punish an imam for leading regular Friday prayers in a mosque. Prosecutors in the southern town of Alushta brought a case against Imam Yusuf Ashirov on 1 April of conducting such "illegal missionary activity" since July 2019.

Imam Ashirov explained to the deputy prosecutor that he had preached in the mosque solely to other mosque members and had not explained his faith to others. "I have no desire to break the law," he told Forum 18.

"Being the imam of an officially-registered community, he carried out the hutba [sermon] on Fridays among his fellow believers, mosque members," Imam Ashirov's lawyer Lilia Hemedzhy told the Crimean Solidarity monitoring group. "This is not 'illegal missionary activity'" (see below).

The prosecution relates to worship before the coronavirus outbreak. Imam Ashirov and the community halted public worship in late March. The Crimean Muslim Board similarly decided on 23 March to halt all public worship in its mosques.

The community gained legal registration in 1993 under Ukrainian law and re-registration in 2016 after the Russian annexation of Crimea. It has worshipped in the town's 19th century Yuhary-Jami mosque building since 1994. However, the mosque community has been trying to challenge the authorities' decision to overturn their ownership and declare their mosque building state property (see below).

Two of the mosque's official founders were among eight Crimean Tatars arrested in June 2019. They are facing criminal charges for alleged membership of the Hizb ut-Tahrir organisation.

Russia's March 2014 annexation of Crimea is not recognised by Ukraine or internationally.

The Prosecutor of Sovetskoe District in eastern Crimea summoned mosque leader Dilyaver Khalilov on 1 April for questioning about a prosecution for "illegal missionary activity". The summons came less than two weeks after police and plain clothes officials raided the mosque in the village of Zavetnoe just after Friday prayers finished. However, the summons was then cancelled because of the coronavirus outbreak. A police officer who took part in the raid refused to discuss it with Forum 18 (see below).

Meanwhile, on 2 March a Magistrate's Court in Crimea's capital Simferopol fined Imam Rasim Dervishev for leading Friday prayers. Prosecutors brought the case of "illegal missionary activity" after a December 2019 raid by Russian security forces just after prayers concluded at the mosque (see below).

"It is absurd to require anyone to ask permission to conduct religious rituals," his lawyer Ayder Azamatov told Forum 18 from Simferopol. "Imam Dervishev decided not to appeal against the punishment and paid the fine" (see below).

"Missionary" prosecutions frequent

In Russian-occupied Crimea in 2019, there were [24 prosecutions brought against 23 individuals and 1 community for ill-defined "missionary activity", of which 17 ended with punishment](#), Forum 18 found. All 17 were fined about five days' average local wage each. Many of those punished were prosecuted for holding worship at unapproved venues or for sharing their faith on the street.

There were also [11 cases brought in Crimea in 2019 against 10 religious communities and 1 individual to punish them for failing to use the full legal name of a registered religious community on their place of worship or on literature](#). Four of these 11 cases ended with fines of one month's average local wages each, and 2 defendants received a warning. The other 5 cases ended with no punishment.

In addition, the Russian authorities have used "extremism"-related criminal prosecutions in Crimea to punish the exercise of freedom of religion or belief.

Crimean Muslim prisoner of conscience Renat Suleimanov is serving a four-year jail term in a labour camp in Russia as a member of the Muslim missionary movement Tabligh Jamaat after meeting openly in mosques with three friends to discuss their faith. In January 2020 he [completed a six-month term in the labour camp punishment cell](#). Three others convicted with him were given suspended sentences.

On 5 March, [two Jehovah's Witnesses were convicted in separate "extremism"-related criminal cases](#). A court in Dzhankoi jailed Sergei Filatov for six years with an additional five years' additional restrictions. A court in Yalta fined Artyom Gerasimov about two years' average salary for those in work. Further criminal cases against Crimean Jehovah's Witnesses are underway.

Alushta: "This is not 'illegal missionary activity'"

On 1 April, the deputy prosecutor in the southern Crimean town of Alushta summoned by telephone Imam Yusuf Ashirov, Imam of the town's independent Yukhary-Jami mosque. Only once he had arrived there did the deputy prosecutor tell him that an administrative case had been launched against him under Russian Administrative Code Article 5.26, Part 4, Imam Ashirov told Forum 18 from Alushta on 7 April. The deputy prosecutor handed him the indictment, signed by the town's Prosecutor Sergei Brodsky.

Article 5.26, Part 4 punishes "Russians conducting missionary activity". This incurs a fine of 5,000 to 50,000 Roubles. For organisations (legal entities), the fine is 100,000 to 1 million Roubles.

Imam Ashirov explained to the deputy prosecutor that he had preached in the mosque solely to other mosque members and had not explained his faith to others. "I have no desire to break the law," he told Forum 18. He asked prosecutors to bring in a religious specialist who could explain his actions as a preacher.

"Yusuf Ashirov was deprived of the opportunity of being represented," his lawyer Lilia Hemedzhy told the Crimean Solidarity monitoring group on 1 April, "deprived of the right to have the services of a defender."

"Being the imam of an officially-registered community, he carried out the hutba [sermon] on Fridays among his fellow believers, mosque members," Hemedzhy insisted. "This is not 'illegal missionary activity' as the law defines 'illegal missionary activity' as activity directed at spreading one's faith among individuals of other faiths, or among individuals who are not adherents of the given faith."

Prosecutors deemed the "offences" to have taken place since 25 July 2019, Hemedzhy told Crimean Solidarity.

Imam Ashirov also complained that prosecutors had potentially endangered his and his family's health by summoning him to the Prosecutor's Office during the coronavirus outbreak.

The telephone at Alushta Prosecutor's Office went unanswered each time Forum 18 called on 7 April.

Alushta: Seizing mosque from community

Prosecutors' decision to deem Imam Ashirov's "offences" to have taken place since 25 July 2019 is significant. On 25 June 2019, exactly one month earlier, Crimea's Supreme Court had rejected the community's appeal against Alushta City Court's decision on 14 February 2019 to reject its appeal against a decision to overturn their ownership and declare their mosque building state property.

The community has worshipped in Alushta's 19th century Yukhary-Jami mosque building since 1994. Ashirov chaired the community from 2001, and then became Imam in 2014.

The community gained legal registration in 1993 under Ukrainian law and re-registration in August 2016 as an independent religious organisation after the Russian annexation of Crimea, according to Russian tax records.

The community sought to challenge a Crimean Council of Ministers decision of 18 September 2018 which handed control of Yukhary-Jami mosque to Crimea's State Committee for Inter-ethnic Relations and Deported Citizens. The community pointed to decisions in 1994 and 1996 which handed the historic mosque to the community.

The community brought the suit also against the Crimean Muslim Board. Community members fear that the authorities wish to transfer the mosque for its use.

However, the Supreme Court rejected the community's arguments, insisting that the mosque was state property and that the Crimean Council of Ministers therefore had the right to issue the decision, according to the court decision seen by Forum 18.

"The 1994 decision to grant us the mosque has never been cancelled," Imam Ashirov told Forum 18. "How can they adopt a new decision without cancelling the old?"

Imam Ashirov noted though that nothing had changed following the June 2019 Supreme Court decision. "We continued to function as an independent mosque, with regular prayers, until we had to halt worship in March because of coronavirus."

Sovetskoe: Imam's summons cancelled

The Prosecutor of Sovetskoe District in eastern Crimea, Dmitry Bailema, summoned mosque leader Dilyaver Khalilov for questioning on 1 April, according to the summons seen by Forum 18. The summons related to a prosecution under Russian Administrative Code Article 5.26, Part 4 ("Russians conducting missionary activity") following an "inspection" on the mosque in the village of Zavetnoe.

However, the summons was then cancelled because of the coronavirus outbreak, the lawyer Lilia Hemedzhy told Forum 18 on 7 April.

Prosecutor Bailema's phone went unanswered each time Forum 18 called on 7 April.

The summons came less than two weeks after officials raided the mosque. Police and plain clothes officials arrived at the mosque just after Friday prayers on 20 March, mosque members told Crimean Solidarity the same day. They prevented worshippers from leaving and questioned them.

Officers told mosque members they were conducting an investigation about alleged "missionary activity", reading out the relevant Article 24.2 of Russia's Religion Law. They pressured the Imam to write a statement and promised they would later be in contact with him. Only one of the police officers, Valentin Shostak, gave his name.

Forum 18 reached police officer Shostak on 7 April, but he put the phone down as soon as it asked him about the raid.

The mosque first gained registration with the Ukrainian authorities in 2000.

Simferopol: "Missionary" fine follows raid

On 2 March, Judge Yelena Klepova of Simferopol Magistrate's Court No. 13 found Imam Rasim Dervishev guilty of violating Russian Administrative Code Article 5.26, Part 4 ("Russians conducting missionary activity") by preaching and leading the namaz in the mosque. She fined him 5,000 Russian Roubles, about five days' average local wage, according to court records.

"It is absurd to require anyone to ask permission to conduct religious rituals," his lawyer Ayder Azamatov told Forum 18 from Simferopol on 7 April. "Imam Dervishev decided not to appeal against the punishment and paid the fine."

Police and FSB security service officers, as well as officials from the Prosecutors Office

and the Emergency Situations Ministry, raided the mosque just after prayers concluded on 3 December 2019, Azamatov noted.

The Deputy Prosecutor of Simferopol's Kiev District Andrei Gritsaichuk then brought a case against Imam Dervishev. On 14 January 2020, he [handed the case to Simferopol Magistrate's Court No. 13](#). Several hearings took place in the case before Judge Klepova issued her decision on 2 March.

Azamatov argued in court that the Imam should not be punished for leading Friday prayers as no proof had been presented that Imam Dervishev had spoken to anyone outside the mosque about his religious beliefs.

At a hearing in the case on 29 January, a witness Dzhelyaylov claimed that the interrogation record contained statements he had never made. He testified that he had never witnessed Imam Dervishev inviting any non-community member to join. Other witnesses testified that they too had not witnessed that.

After viewing a video of Imam Dervishev preaching, a religious studies expert, Bulatov, similarly told the 29 January hearing that he could see no evidence of any missionary activity.

Other "missionary" fines

Several other individuals have been prosecuted in 2020 under Russian Administrative Code Article 5.26, Part 4 ("Russians conducting missionary activity").

On 10 March, Judge Tayana Protsenko of Magistrate's Court No. 9 in Simferopol fined N. Aslanov 5,000 Russian Roubles, about five days' average local wages, according to court records.

On 11 March, Judge Alime Ametova of Magistrate's Court No. 40 in Yevpatoria fined Messianic Rabbi Viktor Vilensky, according to the decision seen by Forum 18. He was accused of conducting "missionary activity" by leading meetings for worship in the city of Sevastopol, while his community is registered in the Republic of Crimea, a separate jurisdiction.

32nd Jehovah's Witness criminal conviction

By Victoria Arnold

Forum 18 (03.04.2020) - <https://bit.ly/2xWuA8e> - On 1 April, Igor Ivashin became the 32nd Jehovah's Witness convicted of "continuing the activity of an extremist organisation" since the 2017 Supreme Court ban. A Siberian court handed him a six-year suspended sentence, requiring him to live under restrictions. Jehovah's Witness Vladimir Alushkin was freed from pre-trial detention after nearly ten months after a court overturned his six-year jail term. He and five others face a new trial.

A man from the Sakha Republic in Siberia has become the 32nd Jehovah's Witness to be convicted of "continuing the activity of an extremist organisation" since the Russian Supreme Court ruling which liquidated all Jehovah's Witness legal entities and outlawed their activities. On 1 April, a court handed 43-year-old Igor Ivashin a six-year suspended sentence, during which he will be subject to a range of conditions and restrictions.

"The Russian Federation publicly positions itself as a democratic state that guarantees the rights and freedom of its citizens," Ivashin told the court in his final statement. "And what do we see in fact? In fact, the exact opposite. Freedom of conscience is NOT guaranteed, freedom of religion is NOT guaranteed, the right is not given to profess any religion individually or jointly with others."

Ivashin continued: "But all this, including the cases of the persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses that are currently underway in Russia, is happening before the eyes of the whole world. And in this case, the reputation of our country suffers greatly, turning it, in fact, into a totalitarian state" (see below).

The Prosecutor's Office of the Sakha Republic has not responded to Forum 18's questions on Ivashin's case, including why collective prayer and Bible reading were considered criminal, given that the Supreme Court's ruling prohibited the activities of the Jehovah's Witnesses' legal entities, not the profession of their beliefs (see below).

Six other Jehovah's Witnesses, meanwhile, are the first in the country to succeed in having a guilty verdict overturned and their case sent for re-examination. On 25 March, Penza Regional Court overturned the six-year jail sentence the lower court handed to Vladimir Alushkin in December 2019. Tatyana Alushkina (Vladimir's wife), Galiya Olkhova, Denis Timoshin, Andrey Magliv, and Vladimir Kulyasov all received two-year suspended sentences. The six will now undergo a retrial (see below).

Penza's Investigation Prison released the 55-year-old Alushkin on 30 March after 291 days detention. He remains under travel restrictions, as do the other five defendants (see below).

"We are certainly pleased about today's ruling, especially since it means Vladimir can return home to his wife," Jehovah's Witness spokesperson Jarrod Lopes commented on 25 March. "However, nearly 350 Jehovah's Witnesses are still facing criminal prosecution in Russia and Crimea simply for their peaceful worship. Thus, today's ruling won't have much meaning until the home raids, arrests, and convictions stop or at least decrease Federation-wide."

Meanwhile, prosecutors in Siberia's Krasnoyarsk Region have dropped "extremism"-related criminal cases against two Muslims who meet to study their faith using the works of the late Turkish Muslim theologian Said Nursi. Similar criminal cases have been launched, however, against two other Muslims, a woman in Tatarstan and a man in Dagestan (see below).

Extremism charges

Jehovah's Witnesses have largely been convicted, charged (or named as suspects) under Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 1 or Part 2 ("Organisation of" or "Participation in the activities of a banned extremist organisation"). For exercising their right to freedom of religion and belief by meeting for worship, they stand accused of "continuing the activities" of the Jehovah's Witness Administrative Centre and its subsidiary local organisations, all of which the Russian Supreme Court [ruled extremist and ordered liquidated in April 2017](#).

Investigators have also charged a few individuals under Criminal Code Article 282.3, Part 1 ("Financing of extremist activity"), or Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 1.1 ("Inclination, recruitment or other involvement of a person in an extremist organisation").

These prosecutions are happening despite the Supreme Court judges' insistence when

they issued the ruling that it "does not amount to prohibition of the religion of Jehovah's Witnesses as such", and despite the fact that the Russian government has twice claimed that the ban "does not contain a restriction or prohibition on individual profession of [Jehovah's Witness] teachings".

Muslims who meet to study the works of late Turkish theologian Said Nursi also face prosecution under the Extremism Law, and in particular under Criminal Code Article 282.2, Parts 1 and 2 for "continuing the activities" of "Nurdzhular", a "banned extremist organisation" which Muslims in Russia deny exists.

Lensk, Sakha Republic: Ivashin conviction

On 1 April, at the end of a trial lasting two months, Judge Zhanna Shmidt of Lensk District Court in Siberia's Sakha Region handed Igor Nikolayevich Ivashin (born 16 April 1976) a six-year suspended sentence. The verdict came in a case which has lasted more than two years from initial investigation to conviction. Prosecutors had requested that Ivashin be sentenced to seven years in a general-regime prison colony.

The Judge punished Ivashin under 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"). He intends to appeal, the European Association of Jehovah's Witnesses stated on 1 April.

Should his appeal be unsuccessful and the verdict enter legal force, Ivashin will be on probation for three and a half years. If he is convicted of any other offence during this time – including any continued Jehovah's Witness activities – he may have to serve the full term in prison, as well as any sentence imposed for the later offence.

Judge Shmidt also imposed a number of restrictions: for one year, Ivashin may not leave his home town of Lensk without permission and may not change his place of work without informing the probation authorities; for five years, he may not hold any leadership position in a public organisation.

Forum 18 wrote to the Prosecutor's Office of the Sakha Republic before the start of its working day on 2 April, asking why it had sought such a long custodial sentence, in what way Ivashin could be considered dangerous, and why collective prayer and Bible reading were considered criminal, given that the Supreme Court's ruling prohibited the activities of the Jehovah's Witnesses' legal entities, not the profession of their beliefs. Forum 18 had received no reply by the end of the working day in Sakha on 3 April. It is unknown whether the Prosecutor's Office intends to appeal against the court's decision.

In his final statement before the court on 25 March, Ivashin noted: "The prosecution asks [the court] to convict me for 'extremism', perceiving this, as stated in the indictment, in the fact that I sang songs, watched films with my friends, and carried out religious preaching. And since the state prosecutor understands perfectly well that these actions alone cannot be a crime, he sees my guilt in the fact that I sang not just songs, but Jehovah's Witness songs. I watched not just films, but Jehovah's Witness films. I was not just giving a religious sermon, but talking about the religion of Jehovah's Witnesses. It turns out that my so-called guilt is that I am a Jehovah's Witness."

Ivashin noted that Article 282.2 under which he was on trial is in the Criminal Code in the section: "Crimes against the foundations of the constitutional system and state security". He asked the court: "And what have I personally done against the state? Read the Bible? Praised God in hymns with my friends? Can this be called a crime against state security?"

Investigative Committee operatives arrested Ivashin along with more than 20 fellow believers in mass raids on homes in Lensk on 30 June 2018. The Jehovah's Witnesses had been under surveillance for more than six months; investigators had tapped Ivashin's phone and recorded all his conversations. Of those taken to the police station for interrogation, only Ivashin was charged.

Unlike many other Jehovah's Witnesses facing prosecution, Ivashin spent the duration of the investigation and trial under travel restrictions, rather than in detention. Even under lesser restrictions, being under criminal investigation can be stressful.

"I want to note that because of unfounded and false accusations, for more than a year and a half I have been under constant pressure from the authorities," Ivashin told the court in his final statement. "Everywhere, at work and at home, my family and I constantly feel this pressure and anxiety. Every time a car drives up to the house, everyone immediately thinks: 'Surely a search again! Or something else?' My family and my relatives are constantly under stress due to the fact that we could be separated."

On 20 November 2019, at its first full hearing, Judge Sergey Osmushin of Lensk District Court sent Ivashin's case back to the prosecutor's office. The judge considered that the indictment did not make any specific accusations, the jw-russia.org news website reported on 22 November 2019, and did not establish how "religious singing" and "preaching" were related to the continued activities of a liquidated Jehovah's Witness religious organisation (no such organisation was ever registered in Lensk, according to federal tax records).

The Supreme Court of the Sakha Republic overturned this decision on 9 January 2020, and Ivashin's trial began again before a new judge, Zhanna Shmidt, on 7 February 2020.

Penza: Six face retrial

Six Jehovah's Witnesses [convicted in December 2019](#) are to undergo a re-examination of their case after Penza Regional Court overturned a lower court decision on 25 March 2020. The case has been returned to Penza's Lenin District Court, where it will be reconsidered by a new judge. It is unknown when these new proceedings will begin.

Vladimir Aleksandrovich Alushkin (born 30 June 1964) was sentenced to six years' imprisonment under 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").

On 30 March 2020, Alushkin was released from the Investigation Prison in the town of Ruzayevka in the Republic of Mordovia and returned to Penza, where he will remain under travel restrictions. Including time spent in detention during the investigation and original trial, he spent a total of 291 days – almost ten months – behind bars (as well as 313 days under house arrest).

Tatyana Sergeyevna Alushkina (born 12 September 1963), Galiya Anvarovna Olkhova (born 5 February 1970), Denis Vladimirovich Timoshin (born 20 March 1980), Andrey Aleksandrovich Magliv (born 20 June 1984), and Vladimir Aleksandrovich Kulyasov (born 17 April 1974) were all tried under Criminal Code Article 282.2 Part 2 ("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").

The five all received two-year suspended sentences and – like Alushkin – remain under

travel restrictions while the retrial is pending. Timoshin, Magliv, and Kulyasov had spent 515 days under house arrest before and during their original trial.

Judge Roman Tanchenko of Lenin District Court originally convicted the six on 13 December 2019, after a trial lasting five months. "The essence of [their] 'extremism' was that the believers, following the example of first-century Christians, came together for discussion of the Bible, hymn-singing, and prayers to Jehovah God," the jw-russia.org news website commented on 30 March 2020.

The United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention has criticised Russia for detaining Vladimir Alushkin. In an Opinion (No. 34/2019) released in August 2019, the Working Group concluded that he "should not have been arrested and held in pretrial detention, and no trial of Mr. Alushkin should take place".

It noted that Alushkin and the others had been charged with extremism for "holding conversations in public places and residential premises with the inhabitants of the city of Penza .. recruiting new members from among their relatives, friends, and residents of the city of Penza", and "holding religious services 'to study their ideology'".

"The Working Group is unable to accept that any of these activities could be described as organisation of or participation in the activities of an extremist organisation; nor can it see any other reasons that might justify the limitation of Mr. Alushkin's rights under Article 18 of the [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights]. All the activities that Mr. Alushkin engaged in were entirely peaceful religious discussions. It is clear to the Working Group that Mr. Alushkin did nothing more than exercise his right to freedom of religion under Article 18 of the Covenant."

Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights states: "This right shall include freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching."

Two Muslim prosecutions dropped, but new cases launched

Two criminal prosecutions of Muslims who read the works of Said Nursi in Krasnoyarsk Region of Siberia have been dropped.

Prosecutors officially closed the case against Denis Vladimirovich Zhukov in early 2020, citing the provision attached to Criminal Code Article 282.2 which allows "a person who has committed [this] offence for the first time and voluntarily ceased participation in the activities of the [extremist] public or religious association, [to] be freed from criminal liability if his actions do not constitute a different crime".

FSB security service officers initially arrested Zhukov on 23 August 2018. Prosecutors [sent the case back to the Investigative Committee for further work in spring 2019, and it therefore never reached court.](#)

Yevgeny Igoryevich Sukharev made 23 appearances at Sharypovo City Court before the judge [returned this case to prosecutors in February 2019 because of shortcomings in the indictment.](#) Prosecutors in turn sent the case back to investigators. The Investigative Committee closed the case in December 2019, concluding that Sukharev had not, in fact, committed an offence.

Two Muslim men who read Nursi's works (Artur Abdulgamidovich Kaltuyev and Ilgar Vagif-ogly Aliyev) are serving prison sentences, and four have been released from prison

within the last year (Sukhrab Abdulgamidovich Kaltuyev, Ziyavdin Badirsoltanovich Dapayev, Komil Olimovich Odilov, and Yevgeny Lvovich Kim).

Kim was released on 10 April 2019, but was [deprived of his Russian citizenship, left stateless, and – on the day he completed his prison term – fined and ordered deported to Uzbekistan, his country of birth](#). As of early April 2020, he remains in a temporary detention centre for foreign nationals in Khabarovsk, awaiting deportation to Uzbekistan.

Two new prosecutions of Muslims who read Nursi's works are known to be underway in the Republics of Tatarstan in the Urals and Dagestan in the North Caucasus. One is under house arrest and the other in pre-trial detention (see forthcoming F18News article).

Special Bimonthly FORB Digest (16-31.03.2020)

News about Jehovah's Witnesses and other religious issues

As of March 31, 2020, there were

**325 Jehovah's Witnesses under investigation and facing criminal charges
35 in prison (26 pretrial)
18 under house arrest
24 convicted (9 imprisoned, 9 fined, 6 received other penalties)**

27.03.20 - FSB officers in Khabarovsk, aware of the recent death of a believer, raided the home of his widow

Link to full text in Russian

<https://jw-russia.org/news/2020/03/8.html>

On March 23, 2020, FSB officers ransacked the home and seized personal items of 38-year-old Yelena Avramenko. A ruling was issued for the search although her husband, Igor, recently died of heart failure. This circumstance did not deter investigator Stanislav Grebenkin from the disrespectful intrusion.

[Continue reading...](#)

26.03.20 - Investigation of Japanese cult leader completed

Link to full text in Russian: <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=74531>

The investigator has completed the investigation and has sent to the prosecutor's office the case against the head of the Russian cell of the terrorist association Aum Shinrikyo (which is forbidden in the RF), Mikhail Ustiantsev, an official representative of the S.K.R. [Investigative Committee of Russia], Svetlana Petrenko, reported.

[Continue reading...](#)

25.03.20 - Sentencing of Jehovah's Witness set for Tuesday

Link to full text in Russian: <https://ovdinfo.org/express-news/2020/03/25/prokuror-zaprosil-7-let-obvinyaemomu-po-delu-svideteley-iegovy>

In the Lensk district court of the republic of Sakha (Yakutia), the prosecutor's office demanded a real time sentence for Igor Ivashin, who is accused of directing the activity of Jehovah's Witnesses.

[Continue reading...](#)

25.03.20 - Convicted Jehovah's Witnesses win appeal of penalty

Link to full text in Russian: <https://tass.ru/proisshestviya/8076215>

On Wednesday, the oblast court of Penza overturned the decision of the court of the first instance, which sentenced to six years in a penal colony the leader of the local cell of the organization of Jehovah's Witnesses (which is forbidden in Russia), Vladimir Alushkin, as well as five subjects of the case, who were given suspended prison terms. The case was sent for another review in the Lenin district court of Penza, TASS was told in the press service of the oblast court.

[Continue reading...](#)

25.03.2020 - In the City of Penza, Court of Appeal overturns conviction of six Jehovah's Witnesses. Alushkin must leave jail in the near future

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2020/03/7.html>

On March 25, 2020, the Penza Regional Court quashed the verdict for believers Vladimir and Tatyana Alushkin, Vladimir Kulyasov, Andrey Magliv, Galiya Olkhova, and Denis Timoshin and returned the case for a new trial. Vladimir Alushkin should exit the pre-trial detention center as soon as the hard copy of the appeal ruling is received there.

[Continue reading...](#)

24.03.2020 - Tactics of intimidation against Jehovah's Witnesses

Link to full text in Russian: <https://novayagazeta.ru/news/2020/03/24/160047-v-yoshkar-ole-prishedshih-na-zasedanie-po-delu-svideteley-iegovy-slushateley-vyzvali-na-dopros-v-fsb?fromtg=1>

In Yoshkar-Ola, arrivals for a court session regarding continuation of the measure of restriction of an adherent of the Jehovah's Witnesses (an organization ruled in Russia to be extremist and forbidden), Ekaterina Pagasheva, were given summons to interrogation at the F.S.B. This is stated on the website of the organization.

[Continue reading...](#)

24.03.2020 - Arrival for trial of Jehovah's Witnesses in Yoshkar-Ola given summons to interrogation at F.S.B.

Link to the full text in Russian: <https://zona.media/news/2020/03/23/pegasheva>

Believers coming for a court session regarding the Jehovah's Witness Ekaterina Pegasheva from Mari El in Yoshkar-Ola were handed summons to interrogation in the local department of the F.S.B. This was reported on the website of the organization.

[Continue reading...](#)

17.03.2020 - European Union calls on Russian authorities to stop ill-treatment of Jehovah's Witnesses

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2020/03/6.html>

A joint statement of the 27 European states-members of the European Union (EU) was circulated on March 12, 2020, in Vienna at a meeting of the Permanent Council of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. The statement was joined by another six non-EU countries.

[Continue reading...](#)

14.03.2020 - Jehovah's Witnesses mount defense in south of Russia

Link to full text in Russia: <https://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/347068/>

The investigation and prosecution may summon Jehovah's Witnesses for questioning, but this will not force them to refuse to support their fellow believers, who have already been put on trial on a charge of extremism, representatives of the congregation declare.

[Continue reading...](#)

Misuse of the anti-extremism laws in February

Prosecutions against religious organizations and believers

HRWF (31.03.2020) - The Moscow-based Sova-Center has just published the results of its investigation about [the misuse of the anti-extremism laws in February in Russia.](#)

The religious movements examined are Muslims supporting a non-violent political movement (Hizb un-Tahrir), a peaceful Muslim missionary movement (Tablighi Jamaat) and Jehovah's Witnesses:

Muslims

In early February, the Central District Military Court sentenced ten Kazan supporters of the radical Islamic **Hizb ut-Tahrir** party (recognized as a terrorist organization in

Russia): Inar Zyalilov, Ruslan Gabidullin, Azat Gataullin, Abdulkakhor Muminjanov, Sergey Derzhipilsky, Zulfat Sabirzianov, Komil Matiev, Farid Kryev, Rustem Salakhutdinov and Inaz Safiullin. Depending on their role, they were charged under Article 205.5 Part 1 (organizing the activities of a terrorist organization), Article 205.5 Part 2 (participation in such activities), Article 205.1 Part 1 (recruiting for terrorist activity), Article 205.2 Part 1 (propaganda of terrorism) and Article 205.2 Part 2 (propaganda of terrorism on the Internet) of the Criminal Code and received sentences ranging from 11 to 22 years in a maximum security colony. The defendants pleaded not guilty, stating that they condemned terrorism and never called for either the overthrow of the constitutional order or the forcible seizure of power.

In Yekaterinburg, the Central District Military Court sentenced Kazan resident Eduard Nizamov. The investigation labeled Nizamov "the leader of the Russian wing" of Hizb ut-Tahrir. He was found guilty under Article 205.1 Part 1 and Article 205.5 Part 1 of the Criminal Code, as well as of attempted forcible seizure of power under Articles 30 and 278 of the Criminal Code and sentenced to 23 years in a maximum security colony and a fine of 200 thousand rubles. Nizamov pleaded not guilty to any of the charges and intends to appeal the verdict.

In mid-February, in Tatarstan, the Central District Military Court found Shamil Galimov guilty under Article 205.5 Part 1 of the Criminal Code, and Ilimir Motygullin - under Article 205.5 Part 2 of the Criminal Code. Galimov was sentenced to 17 years in a maximum security penal colony and a fine of 20 thousand rubles, and Motygullin - to 13 years in a maximum security penal colony. The FSB of Russia Directorate for Tatarstan claimed that, in addition to their usual activities as party members, the defendants "were engaged in recruiting for Hizb ut-Tahrir combat units in the Middle East," but we do not know what formed the basis for these allegations.

We believe that prosecuting Hizb ut-Tahrir members under "terrorist" articles merely on the basis of their party activities (holding meetings, reading literature, etc.) is inappropriate, since the party has never been known to practice terrorism.

In mid-February, the FSB of Russia announced the detention of "three leaders and four active members of a hidden cell" of **Tablighi Jamaat**, a peaceful movement of Islamic preachers, inappropriately recognized as extremist in Russia. A criminal case was opened under Parts 1 and 2 of Article 282.2 (organizing the activities of an extremist organization and participation in it). Six suspects were arrested, all citizens of the Kyrgyz Republic: Aybek Mamazhunusov, Murzy Kushuev, Aybek Halmatov, Asan Uulu, Artyk Kalbaev and Altynbek Kozonov.

An employee of one of the rural libraries in the Novosergievsky District in the Orenburg Region was fined two thousand rubles under Article 20.29 of the Code of Administrative Offenses (distribution of extremist materials) in February. The administrative case was based on the fact of finding Fortress of the Muslim - a popular collection of prayers for every day, recognized as extremist despite the fact that, in our opinion, it contains no aggressive rhetoric - during a library inspection by law enforcement authorities.

Jehovah's Witnesses

In February, several sentences were issued for continuing activity of Jehovah's Witnesses communities and a number of new cases were opened. The charges have been brought against believers in connection with the fact that, in April 2017, the Supreme Court of Russia recognized the Jehovah's Witnesses Administrative Center in Russia and 395 of their local religious organizations as extremist. We believe that this decision, which led to mass prosecutions against believers under Article 282.2 of the Criminal Code, had no legal basis, and regard it as a manifestation of religious discrimination.

Early in the month, the Zheleznodorozhny District Court in Khabarovsk found Stanislav Kim and Nikolai Polevodov guilty under Article 282.2 Part 2 of the Criminal Code and issued two-year suspended sentences to each of them. However, both still remain defendants in another criminal case under Article 282.2 Part 1 of the Criminal Code (organizing activities of an extremist organization).

The Vilyuchinsk City Court in Kamchatka Krai, found the spouses Mikhail and Elena Popov guilty under Article 282.2 Part 2 of the Criminal Code and fined Mikhail 350 thousand rubles, and Elena - 300 thousand in mid-February.

In the second half of February, the Zheleznodorozhny District Court in Khabarovsk found Yevgeny Aksyonov guilty under Article 282.2 Part 2 of the Criminal Code and issued a two-year suspended sentence with restriction of liberty for six months for reading the Bible in the Jehovah's Witnesses translation during a religious meeting.

It was reported in early February that the Kamchatka Regional Court overturned the decision of the Petropavlovsk-Kamchatka City Court, which, in December, returned to the prosecutor's office the criminal case of Sergei Ledenev, charged under Article 282.2 Part 1 of the Criminal Code. The case was returned to the city court for consideration on the merits.

In addition, there were reports in early February that the Investigation Directorate of the Investigative Committee of Russia in the Amur Region opened criminal proceedings against two residents of the region under Article 282.2 Part 1.1 of the Criminal Code (soliciting, recruiting or other involvement of a person in the activities of an extremist organization) in connection with getting minors involved in a Jehovah's Witnesses community.

In February, new criminal cases under Article 282.2 Part 2 of the Criminal Code were initiated in Birobidzhan by the FSB of Russia Directorate for Jewish Autonomous Region. Early in the month the cases were opened against Irina Lokhvitskaya, Anna Lokhvitskaya, Tatyana Sholner, Tatyana Zagulina, Anastasia Guzeva and Natalya Kriger; in mid-February - against Andrei Gubin and Oleg Postnikov. According to investigators, they participated in the continued activities of the local organization, liquidated by a court decision in 2016.

In Primorsky Krai, Lyudmila Shut, a 72-year-old resident of the village of Razdolny, became a suspect in a new criminal case opened under Article 282.2 Part 2 of the Criminal Code.

Mass searches were conducted in the houses of Jehovah's Witnesses in Transbaikal as part of a criminal investigation under Article 282.2 Part 1 of the Criminal Code. The searches took place in the cities of Chita, Shilka and Khilok and the villages of Karymskoye, Kurort-Darasun and Pervomaisky - the places of mass exile of Jehovah's Witnesses to special settlements during the years of Stalin's repressions. Vladimir Yermolaev, Sergey Kiriliuk, Pavel Mamalimov, and Vadim Kutsenko were detained. Jehovah's Witnesses reported that after Kutsenko's detention, representatives of security forces beat him in their car, strangled him and tortured him with electric shocks, restraining his hands with handcuffs and forcing his eyes closed. According to him, the police demanded that he pleaded guilty and testified against his fellow believers. The court put Yermolaev under house arrest; Kiriliuk, Mamalimov, and Kutsenko were released from detention after five days, because the Investigative Committee rejected the request for their arrest.

In Stavropol, employees of the regional Center to Combat Extremism conducted an inspection in the apartment of Denis and Anna Mashkov. Technical equipment, data storage devices and personal records were seized. According to the Mashkovs, several publications included in the Federal List of Extremist Materials were planted during the search. It is not known whether a criminal case has been opened.

New information on the use of torture continues to arrive. In February, Jehovah's Witnesses reported that officers of IK-1 colony in Orenburg beat up five believers from Saratov, who were convicted and sent to the Orenburg Region to serve their sentences: Felix Makhammadiev, Alexei Budenchuk, Alexei Miretsky, Gennady German and Roman Gridasov. It was reported that Felix Makhammadiev suffered "a broken rib, lung damage and kidney damage." Meanwhile, the penal colony staff agreed to call him an ambulance only after he signed a statement stating that "got injured in the bathroom." The information about the beatings was not officially confirmed by the Federal Penitentiary Service of Russia in the Orenburg Region.

Special Bimonthly FORB Digest (01-14.03.2020)

News about Jehovah's Witnesses and other religious issues

As of February 18, 2020, there were

**307 Jehovah's Witnesses under investigation and facing criminal charges
34 in prison (25 pretrial; 9 sentenced)
28 under house arrest
29 convicted (18 in 2019; 11 already in 2020)**

12.03.2020 - Russian FSB plants "prohibited literature" to imprison Crimean Tatar activists for 10 years or more

Russia has carried out a new wave of armed searches and arrests in occupied Bakhchysarai, this time targeting two sons of a renowned Crimean Tatar historian and a TV ATR presenter, now living in mainland Ukraine, who has provided coverage of political repression under Russian occupation.

[Continue reading...](#)

12.03.2020 - MFA of Ukraine protests over the detention of Crimean Muslims in Bakhchisaray

Link to full text in Russian:

https://risu.org.ua/ru/index/all_news/state/church_state_relations/79239

The Russian FSB has detained four Crimean Tatars in the annexed Crimea, who are accused of membership in the organization "Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami". The Ukrainian foreign Ministry calls on European partners to increase pressure on Moscow, DW reports.

[Continue reading...](#)

11.03.2020 - In Adler, FSB officers detained a believer from Saratov. On the way to the pre-trial detention center, the guards insulted and intimidated him

Link to the full text in Russian:

<https://www.jw-russia.org/news/2020/03/5.html>

On February 15, 2020, Adler police detained Saratov resident Rustam Seidkuliyeu in a shopping center.

[Continue reading...](#)

07.03.2020 - MFA outraged because of the persecution of Ukrainian believers in Crimea by Russian occupiers

Link to the full text in Russian:

https://risu.org.ua/ru/index/all_news/community/freedom_of_conscience/79178

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine strongly protests against the sentences of the Russian occupation "courts" in Crimea handed down to Ukrainian citizens Serhiy Filatov and Artem Gerasymov on charges of "organizing activities of an extremist organization".

[Continue reading...](#)

05.03.2020 - In Crimea, one more Jehovah's Witness convicted for his faith. Artem Gerasimov fined RUB 400,000

Link to the full text in Russian: <https://www.jw-russia.org/news/2020/03/4.html>

On March 5, 2020, Judge Vladimir Romanenko of the Yalta City Court in Crimea found Artem Gerasimov guilty of "extremist" activity for talking to people about God and ordered him to pay a RUB 400,000 fine. The prosecutor previously requested that he spend 6.5 years in prison. Artem Gerasimov considers the guilty verdict to be unjust.

[Continue reading...](#)

05.03.20 - Crimea resident Sergey Filatov sentenced to six years in prison for worshipping at home

Link to the full text in Russian: <https://www.jw-russia.org/news/2020/03/3.html>

On March 5, 2020, judge of the Dzhankoy District Court Maria Ermakova sentenced Sergey Filatov to six years in prison for alleged "extremist" activity. He was taken into custody in the courtroom. The case abounds with falsifications, the verdict is based on a single home worship incident and will be appealed.

[Continue reading...](#)

05.03.20 - In the Primorye Territory, searches do not stop. The Siloviki came to a 77-year-old believer three times; once he was beaten

Link to the full text in Russian: <https://www.jw-russia.org/news/2020/03/2.html>

On January 22, 2020 authorities conducted a series of searches in the villages of Razdolny and Timofeevka (Primorsky Territory). Law enforcement officers rushed to

three believers, including 77-year-old Vladimir Filippov, who had previously been beaten for faith by security forces.

[Continue reading...](#)

05.03.2020 - Fourth Jehovah's Witness since 2017 imprisoned for six years

Link to the full text in Russian: <https://zona.media/news/2020/03/05/fltv6>

The Dzhankoy district court in Crimea sentenced an adherent of the Jehovah's Witnesses, Sergei Filatov, to six years in a prison colony in a case regarding arranging the activity of an extremist organization (part 1 of article 282.2 of the Criminal Code). This was reported on the court's website.

[Continue reading...](#)

04.03.2020 - Jehovah's Witnesses caught in complicated appeals process

Link to the full text in Russian: <https://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/346689/>

The fifth cassation court of general jurisdiction in Piatigorsk found the detention in custody of four Jehovah's Witnesses of Dagestan, who are charged with extremism, to be illegal. Courts in Dagestan will have to take this decision into account, the lawyer thinks.

[Continue reading...](#)

03.03.2020 - Russian government bodies compete for Jehovah's Witnesses' property

Link to the full text in Russian:

<https://sakhalin.info/news/185818?fbclid=IwAR2NcZ0ajBwXjyxTVkrcQjbIeK9EEChTvPLj3JheugjYDnHzz-6AdNhuLtU>

The State Inspection of Labor in Sakhalin oblast is ready for the move. As of today, its office in Iuzhno-Sakhalinsk is located at 38 Anton Buiukla Street. The new home of the labor inspectorate will be the former Kingdom Hall of the Jehovah's Witnesses, located at 676 Prospect Pobedy.

[Continue reading...](#)

02.03.2020 - Putin grants church's requests for changes in constitution

Link to the full text in Russian: <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=dujour&div=390>

The chairman of the State Duma, Viacheslav Volodin, described for journalists on Monday how an amendment to the constitution, introduced by the president and mentioning God, is worded.

[Continue reading...](#)

02.03.2020 - A 74-year-old resident of Chelyabinsk and his wife persecuted for faith. The investigator considered the elderly couple extremists

Link to the full text in Russian: <https://www.jw-russia.org/news/2020/03/1.html>

Aleksandr Chepenko, assigned to particularly important cases of the Investigative Department of the Investigative Committee of the Chelyabinsk Region, opened a criminal case against 74-year-old Vladimir Suvorov.

[Continue reading...](#)

Impunity for officials who torture?

Forum 18 (13.03.2020) - <https://bit.ly/2Ql8Ppd> - No officials accused in three cases of torture of individuals detained for exercising freedom of religion or belief appear to have been arrested or put on criminal trial. Prison officials in Blagoveshchensk between 2015 and 2017 oversaw the torture of Yevgeny Kim, which included broken ribs and attempted rape. Investigators in Surgut in February 2019 hooded, kicked, beat and tortured seven Jehovah's Witnesses with electric shocks.

Officials suspected of torturing Muslims and Jehovah's Witnesses do not appear to have been – as Russia's international human rights obligations require - either arrested or put on criminal trial for torture.

No officials of Investigation Prison No. 1 in the Far Eastern city of Blagoveshchensk accused of overseeing the torture of Muslim prisoner of conscience Yevgeny Kim between 2015 and 2017 appear to have been arrested or put on trial. During the torture, his ribs were broken and he suffered attempted rape (see below).

The local human rights Ombudsperson told Forum 18 she has no information about Kim's time in detention. The prosecutor's office and the Federal Prison Service have not responded to Forum 18's questions (see below).

No officials of the Investigative Committee in Surgut in western Siberia accused of torturing seven Jehovah's Witnesses after their arrest in February 2019 appear to have been arrested or put on trial. During the torture, investigators hooded them with plastic bags, kicked and beat them, and gave them electric shocks, Jehovah's Witnesses complain. Six of the seven men face "extremism"-related criminal prosecution (see below).

Neither the local nor the national human rights Ombudsperson has responded to Forum 18's questions. The federal-level Investigative Committee in Moscow, which took over the investigation into the torture in June 2019, has not replied to Forum 18's questions (see below).

No FSB security service officers in Kaluga south-west of Moscow, accused of mistreating Jehovah's Witness Roman Makhnyov and his daughter in June 2019, appear to have been arrested or put on trial. FSB officers made his 15-year-old daughter go outside and stand barefoot in the street while they searched the family's flat. At the local FSB building, officers left Makhnyov standing handcuffed to a heating pipe all night. Over two days of interrogation, officers gave him no food, Jehovah's Witnesses complain (see below).

Kaluga Region FSB has not replied to Forum 18's questions. Kaluga Regional Human

Rights Ombudsman told Forum 18 that he had asked the prosecutor's office about the accusations and it had told him that there were no violations of the law in the conduct of the search, and no evidence that FSB officers had used "illicit methods" against Makhnyov or his family (see below).

2020 torture

Officials have continued to use torture in 2020 against individuals detained for exercising freedom of religion or belief.

Jehovah's Witnesses state that, [in February 2020, National Guard officers tortured two adherents in the Siberian city of Chita, including by means of electric shocks, and prison guards in the Urals city of Orenburg subjected five of their prisoners of conscience to severe beatings, resulting in the hospitalisation of one man.](#)

None of the suspected officials has so far been brought to justice in line with Russia's binding international legal obligations.

Ignoring international obligations

Under the United Nations (UN) Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, Russia is [obliged to both arrest any person suspected on good grounds of having committed torture and also try them under criminal law](#) which makes "these offences punishable by appropriate penalties which take into account their grave nature".

Torture nevertheless remains common. The UN Committee Against Torture's (CAT) Concluding Observations (CAT/C/RUS/CO/6) on Russia, [released in August 2018](#), stated: "The Committee is deeply concerned at numerous reliable reports of the practice of torture and ill-treatment in the State party, including as a means to extract confessions, and at many recent reports documenting cases of torture. .. The Committee is also concerned at reports that allegations of torture rarely resulted in criminal prosecutions and that, even when prosecuted, the perpetrators were charged with simple assault or abuse of authority". The CAT also urged Russia "to combat impunity in torture and ill-treatment cases".

The UN Committee made its remarks after video footage emerged of guards using truncheons to beat Yevgeny Makarov, an inmate at Yaroslavl's Correctional Colony No. 8, and pouring water over his head as he lay on a table. There have been many other examples of abuse within Russia's law enforcement apparatus in recent years.

One in 10 people [who replied to a survey of 3,447 adults from across Russia said they had been tortured by police and other security officers](#), according to a survey published on 27 June 2019 by the Levada Centre, an independent Moscow-based polling body. Three-quarters of adults who said they had suffered torture stated that they had been tortured to humiliate or intimidate them, half that they had been tortured to extract confessions, and a third that they had been tortured as a punishment.

Impunity in Blagoveshchensk

Investigation Prison officers suspected of torturing Yevgeny Lvovich Kim (born 5 October 1974) between 2015 and 2017 do not appear to have been either arrested or put on trial for torture.

Kim was [sentenced to three years and nine months' imprisonment in June 2017 for organising meetings to study the works of late Turkish theologian Said Nursi.](#)

Between Kim's arrest in December 2015 and his transfer to a labour camp in August 2017, he was detained in Investigation Prison No. 1 in Blagoveshchensk. While there, he was [tortured, had his ribs broken, and suffered attempted rape](#). This took place in "the so-called 'press hut', a special room where the necessary testimonies are beaten out [of inmates] by other detainees who are colluding with the prison administration", a fellow Muslim told Forum 18 in October 2017.

In June 2019, Forum 18 wrote to the Human Rights Ombudsperson for Amur Region, Lyubov Khashcheva, to ask whether her office or the Regional Prosecutor's Office had received any communication about Kim's torture and whether a criminal case had ever been opened. Khashcheva replied that she had received no such communication and her office had no information about Kim's time in pre-trial detention.

Yuliya Adusheva, head of the Press Service for Amur Regional Prosecutor's Office, told Forum 18, also in June 2019, that the Prosecutor's Office had received no reports of Kim's torture and had not initiated any investigation or criminal case.

Forum 18 sent these questions again to the Amur Region Human Rights Ombudsperson's Office and the Amur Regional Prosecutor's Office before the start of the working day of 11 March 2020. Ombudsperson Khashcheva replied on 12 March that she still had no information about Kim's time in detention. Forum 18 has received no response from prosecutors.

The Federal Prison Service (FSIN) in Moscow did not reply to Forum 18's questions. The Amur Region's branch of the Prison Service accepts enquiries only from local media, referring all foreign and federal-level media to the Moscow headquarters.

Kim [was released on 10 April 2019, but was deprived of his Russian citizenship, left stateless, and – on the day he completed his prison term – fined and ordered deported to Uzbekistan, his country of birth](#). The official reason for his deportation was that he did not have the correct documents – which officials had confiscated the day before the court decision.

This appears to be the first time anyone has been stripped of citizenship after being convicted under Russia's ["anti-extremism" laws for exercising the right to freedom of religion or belief](#).

Kim remains in a temporary detention centre for foreign nationals in Khabarovsk, awaiting deportation to Uzbekistan, a [violin of freedom of religion and belief](#).

Impunity in Surgut

More than a year after seven Jehovah's Witnesses reported torture at the hands of Investigative Committee staff in Surgut in western Siberia, none of the officers involved appears to have been charged with any criminal offence, and the results of a federal-level investigation of their actions has not been made public.

Sergei Loginov, Kirill Severinchik, Vyacheslav Boronos, Sergei Volosnikov, Artyom Kim, Aleksei Plekhov, and Yevgeny Kayrak described how investigators [hooded them with plastic bags after their arrest on 15 February 2019, kicked and beat them, and gave them electric shocks at the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Region Investigative Committee's Surgut building](#).

The seven men were among at least 15 people taken in for interrogation early that

morning. Most were released after questioning, and those who had been tortured went immediately to have their injuries documented by doctors.

Sergei Loginov [was re-arrested shortly after he called the Investigative Committee's hotline to report his treatment](#). After 56 days in custody, he was [released under specific restrictions on 11 April 2019 \(not allowed to go out at night, communicate with others involved in the case, or use the telephone, internet, or post\)](#).

Instead of being arrested and investigated, two of the Investigative Committee officials implicated in the torture of the Jehovah's Witnesses [were subsequently given awards, ostensibly for their work in 2018](#). Vladimir Yermolayev won "best local department head", and Sergei Bogodyorov took second place in the "best investigator" competition.

Yermolayev and Investigative Committee investigator Stepan Tkach have since been implicated in the torture by riot police of another detainee, former Surgut firefighter Aleksandr Khokhlov (not a Jehovah's Witness), who was arrested for alleged corruption in September 2019, the znak.com news website reported on 21 November 2019.

After regional investigators [twice concluded that their colleagues had committed no criminal offence against the Jehovah's Witnesses, the federal-level Investigative Committee in Moscow took over investigation of the detainees' claims in June 2019](#), but has so far issued no public conclusions nor apparently imposed any punishment or restrictions on the accused investigators.

Forum 18 wrote to the Investigative Committee's Moscow press office before the start of the working day of 2 March, asking what the results of the investigation were, whether a criminal case had been opened, and why the officers concerned had not been arrested. No reply has been received.

On 2 March, Forum 18 also asked the Khanty-Mansi Regional Human Rights Ombudsperson, Natalya Strebkova, and federal Human Rights Ombudsperson, Tatyana Moskalkova, for the results of the investigation of the Jehovah's Witnesses' torture claims. Forum 18 has received no answer from either.

Commenting on the investigations, Jehovah's Witness lawyer Yegiazar Chernikov told Forum 18 in June 2019 that "it could last forever, until you and others have lost any interest in the subject". He continued: "it is very unlikely that the Investigative Committee would initiate a criminal case against torturers who receive their salaries from the same pocket, but we will pursue the initiation of a criminal case, including, if necessary, in the international courts".

In August 2019, Jehovah's Witnesses met in Surgut with: Mikhail Fedotov, then-head of Presidential Human Rights Council; the head of the Khanty-Mansi Regional Investigative Committee; the First Deputy Regional Prosecutor; the Deputy Head of the Khanty-Mansi Regional Interior Ministry; the Region's Deputy Governor; and the mayor of Surgut.

"Law enforcement officials were unable to explain why, despite strong evidence, a criminal case has not yet been opened into torture," the jw-russia.org news website reported on 15 August 2019.

Natalya Fedina, the wife of [one of the prosecuted Jehovah's Witnesses Yevgeny Fedin, commented](#) that it is "a paradoxical situation: a criminal case was opened against 19 people, but there was not a single victim. On the other hand, there are seven people who were tortured and there is not a single criminal case [against the torturers]".

In contrast to the apparent official lack of action against the torturers, their victims face

prosecutions and restrictions. Loginov, Boronos, Kim, Kayrak, Plekhov, and Volosnikov have all been [added to the Rosfinmonitoring "List of Terrorists and Extremists" and charged](#) under one or more parts of Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 1 ("Organisation of"), or Part 2 ("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"), or Part 1.1 ("Inclination, recruitment or other involvement of a person in an extremist organisation").

Loginov, Boronos, Plekhov, Volosnikov have also been placed under travel restrictions. Kirill Severinchik does not appear to be subject to prosecution.

The criminal cases against the Surgut Jehovah's Witnesses were transferred in late 2019 or early 2020 to the federal-level Investigative Committee in Moscow, local news channel SurgutInformTV reported on 21 January 2020.

Nine Surgut Jehovah's Witnesses, including the seven torture victims, lodged an appeal (Application No. 10618/19) at the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) in Strasbourg on 25 February 2019. They made their application under Article 3 ("Prohibition of torture"), Article 5 ("Right to liberty and security"), Article 9 ("Freedom of thought, conscience, and religion"), Article 14 ("Prohibition of discrimination"), Article 17 ("Prohibition of abuse of rights"), and Article 18 ("Limitation on use of restrictions on rights") of the European Convention on Human Rights. The next day, the Court urgently ordered the Russian authorities to have Sergei Loginov (the only victim then in detention) sent for independent medical assessment. The Court has not yet communicated the appeal to the Russian government, Jehovah's Witness lawyer Shane Brady told Forum 18 on 11 March.

In February 2019, Andrey Babushkin, a member of the Presidential Human Rights Council and chair of the Commission to Support Public Monitoring Commissions, demanded an end to the violent treatment of Jehovah's Witnesses in Surgut. In a statement to the General Prosecutor's Office, the head of the Investigative Committee, and the Public Monitoring Commission for the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Region, he insisted that a criminal case be opened against the investigators responsible under Criminal Code Article 210 ("Organisation of criminal activity") and Article 286.3 ("Exceeding official powers"). To date, however, no such criminal case is known to have been opened.

Babushkin has twice asked the Khanty-Mansi Regional Investigative Committee for information on "measures aimed at the defence of the rights and legal interests of the applicants [the Jehovah's Witnesses]", according to a letter dated 27 November 2019 and re-sent on 10 March 2020, seen by Forum 18. He appears to have received no response.

Babushkin also refers in the letter to an additional investigation organised on 26 October 2019. It is unclear whether this was carried out at a regional or federal level, and no outcome is yet known. Forum 18 asked Babushkin for further details of his enquiries to the Investigative Committee, but has received no response.

The actions Babushkin called for are less than those required by Russia's binding international legal obligations, which also require the arrest of officials suspected of torture. Under the United Nations (UN) Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, Russia is [obliged to both arrest any person suspected on good grounds of having committed torture, and also try them under criminal law](#) which makes "these offences punishable by appropriate penalties which take into account their grave nature".

The UN Committee Against Torture's (CAT) August 2018 Concluding Observations ([CAT/C/RUS/CO/6](#)) on Russia stated that it "is concerned...that acts of torture or ill-treatment by public officials are usually prosecuted under [Criminal Code] article 286, abuse of authority, which does not reflect the grave nature of the crime of torture and does not allow the Committee to monitor the State party's prosecution of cases of torture".

Impunity in Kaluga

The FSB security service officers suspected of mistreating Jehovah's Witness Roman Sergeevich Makhnyov (born 4 February 1976) in Kaluga, south-west of Moscow, in June 2019 also do not appear to have been either arrested or investigated.

On 26 June 2019, FSB operatives [arrested Makhnyov in a raid on his home in Kaluga](#). According to Jehovah's Witnesses, they made his 15-year-old daughter go outside and stand barefoot in the street while they searched the family's flat.

During their hours-long search of Makhnyov's home, FSB officers planted items of banned Jehovah's Witness literature, Jehovah's Witnesses reported. When Makhnyov objected, they took him to the local FSB building, where they left him standing handcuffed to a heating pipe all night. Over the next two days of interrogation, officers did not give him any food and he only ate again on the morning of 29 June.

On the same day, the FSB raided six homes in Kaluga, including that of an 81-year-old woman. As well as Makhnyov, they arrested Dmitry Yevgenyevich Kuzin (born 10 July 1965). Both men were placed in pre-trial detention, but were sent home under house arrest on 25 December 2019.

Both Makhnyov and Kuzin have been charged under 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"). On 20 February 2020, a court ordered their release from house arrest under travel restrictions.

Forum 18 wrote to the Kaluga Region FSB on 10 July 2019 and again on 4 March 2020, asking whether it has investigated its officers' maltreatment of Makhnyov and whether the officers concerned are still working. No response has been received to either query.

Kaluga Regional Human Rights Ombudsman Yury Zelnikov told Forum 18 on 15 July 2019 that he was aware of the matter and had sent a request for information to the Regional Prosecutor's Office on 2 July 2019, but had as yet received no response.

On 12 March 2020, Zelnikov told Forum 18 that Makhnyov and his wife themselves had since approached him, and that he had communicated their appeals to the prosecutor's office. In its review of the incident, according to Zelnikov, the prosecutor's office found no violations of the law in the conduct of the search, and no evidence that FSB officers had used "illicit methods" against Makhnyov or his family. The prosecutor's office stated that neither Makhnyov nor any third party had complained to prosecutors or courts about his being deprived of food or his daughter being forced to wait outside during the search.

Zelnikov does not appear to have interviewed either the Makhnyov family or the FSB officers about the claims.

Senior Assistant Prosecutor Nikolay Labunsky told Forum 18 on 22 July 2019 that the Regional Prosecutor's Office had received a report from a third party about the FSB's use

of "illicit methods" against Makhnyov, and that it was looking into the claims. He added, however, that any criminal case against FSB officials would have to be brought by military investigators of the Investigative Committee, as such issues do not fall under the competence of the Regional Prosecutor's Office. (END)

EU Statement on the situation of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia

OSCE Permanent Council No. 1262 Vienna, 12 March 2020

EU Delegation to the OSCE (12.03.2020) - https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/vienna-international-organisations_en - The European Union continues to be deeply concerned about the situation of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia who continue to face systemic persecution, including home raids, arbitrary detentions, criminal investigations and sentences up to seven years of prison time. Furthermore, we are deeply concerned about recent specific reports of torture and other ill-treatment of several members of Jehovah's Witnesses in detention or prior to being taken into custody by either prison guards or law enforcement officers.

According to reports from the European Association of Jehovah's Witnesses, echoed also by Forum 18 and media articles, on 6 February 2020, in Orenburg, five individuals (Aleksey Budenchuk, Gennadiy German, Roman Gridasov, Feliks Makhammadiyev, and Aleksey Miretskiy) were beaten by prison officials of Penal Colony No. 1. All suffered severe injuries and one needed hospitalization. In addition, on 10 February 2020, Vadim Kutsenko was reported to be tortured before being taken into custody, as law enforcement officers repeatedly beat and choked him and applied electric shocks, while demanding information on other Jehovah's Witnesses.

Torture and other ill-treatment are among the most abhorrent violations of human rights, human integrity and human dignity. Torture breaches international human rights law, in particular the UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the European Convention on Human Rights, all of which the Russian Federation is a State Party to. Torture violates the principle of ensuring human security, upon which the OSCE concept of comprehensive security is founded. OSCE and international commitments are abundantly clear: the prohibition of torture is absolute and unconditional. Torture is never justified. All participating States have an obligation to

euoffice@osce.org • eeas.europa.eu/delegations/vienna • PAGE 1/2 take effective measures to prevent acts of torture, prosecute perpetrators of such acts, identify victims and ensure effective redress. We therefore call on the Russian Federation to conduct prompt, effective and thorough investigations into all reports of such acts, in order to ensure that anyone responsible or complicit is brought to justice. Furthermore, we call on the Russian Federation to take effective measures to protect the victims and ensure effective redress. We would appreciate an update on these cases from the delegation of the Russian Federation.

On April 20, 2017, the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation banned the Administrative Center of Jehovah's Witnesses and all local entities on grounds of "extremism". Following this, we have heard the Russian delegation claim more than once in the Permanent Council that Jehovah's Witnesses are, and will continue to be, able to practice their religion freely, and that freedom of religion or belief is guaranteed.

However, we continue to see numerous reports about home raids, arbitrary detentions, and criminal investigations concerning Jehovah's Witnesses. Since the liquidation of all local religious organisations of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia, reportedly 869 houses have been searched, 26 individuals are in pre-trial detention, 23 under house arrest, 316 are charged and 29 already convicted.

As we have stated previously on numerous occasions, all people, including members of the Jehovah's Witnesses, must be able to peacefully enjoy their human rights, including the right to freedom of religion or belief, freedom of association and peaceful assembly and freedom of expression, without discrimination, as guaranteed by the Constitution of the Russian Federation, Russia's OSCE commitments and international obligations. In light of this, we call upon the authorities to drop all charges against individuals who have been unjustifiably prosecuted or imprisoned for exercising their human rights. We call upon the Russian Federation to live up to its international human rights commitments, to respect the freedoms of expression, association, peaceful assembly, religion or belief, as well as the rights of persons belonging to minorities and to guarantee a fair trial.

The EU will continue to follow closely the developments concerning Jehovah's Witnesses across the OSCE region.

The Candidate Countries REPUBLIC of NORTH MACEDONIA, MONTENEGRO* and ALBANIA, and the EFTA country ICELAND, member of the European Economic Area, as well as UKRAINE and GEORGIA align themselves with this statement.*

** Republic of North Macedonia, Montenegro and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.*

CRIMEA: A Jehovah's Witness sentenced to six years in prison

By Jarrod Lopez (*)

HRWF (05.03.2020) - On 5 March, the Dzhankovsky District Court of the Republic of Crimea convicted Sergey Filatov and sentenced him to six years in prison. He is the first one of Jehovah's Witnesses in Crimea to be convicted for the peaceful exercise of his beliefs since the 2017 Russian Supreme Court ruling that effectively banned the activity of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia and Crimea. Sergey and his wife, Natalya, have four children, two of whom are minors. He will appeal the conviction.

Jarrod Lopes, a spokesman for the world headquarters of Jehovah's Witnesses, states: "We are deeply disturbed that the court sentenced Sergey to prison for six years, separating him from his wife and children. He is the first one of Jehovah's Witnesses in Crimea to be convicted for so-called extremist activity. This bleak development in Crimea is the latest example of Russia exporting its patently extreme religious intolerance. Human rights advocates across the globe have publicly criticized Russia for its baseless attack on Jehovah's Witnesses, internationally recognized as peaceful, societally responsible Christians. We hope that senior officials in Russia will soon correct the injustice being doled out in their local courts and that judges in Crimea will follow suit."

Filatov Case Details

Sergey Filatov was first arrested in what was one of the largest special operations against

Jehovah's Witnesses in recent years. On the night of November 16, 2018, some 200 officers raided eight homes of Jehovah's Witnesses in the area. More than 35 law-enforcement officers searched Sergey's home, and about half of them were armed special forces soldiers. Sergey was questioned and then released.

This morning, the court sentenced him to prison because the prosecution claimed that he "undermines the foundations of constitutional order and the security of the state." Yet all he is accused of is reading the Bible together with his friends in his own home.

The Filatov case is rife with falsifications. On the date (October 10, 2017) the investigators alleged a religious service was held in Filatov's home, there actually was no such service, as proven by telephone records. The investigators unlawfully altered evidence; experts for the case did not present their credentials, as required by law; one of the witnesses for the prosecution gave false testimony, as proven by the testimony of other witnesses.

"It is sad that the massive repression of faith, which has been unleashed by security services in dozens of regions of Russia, has reached Crimea," states Yaroslav Sivulskiy, a spokesman for the European Association of Jehovah's Witnesses. "Sergey Filatov was convicted of a grave criminal offense, as a dangerous enemy of the state, for a simple family worship service. The case is obviously trumped up. The investigation did not try to conceal its falsifications in the case, and the court clearly sympathized with the prosecution."

Sergey Filatov is the 30th Jehovah's Witness convicted in modern Russia and Crimea since 2017. His verdict was a consequence of the Supreme Court's decision to liquidate all 22 local religious organizations (LROs) of Jehovah's Witnesses in Crimea. In the less than 2 years of the LROs existence, they never received any fines, warnings, or other claims from the authorities.

Gerasimov Case

Shortly following Sergey's conviction, the Yalta City Court of the Republic of Crimea convicted Artem Gerasimov and fined him 400,000 rubles (over \$6,000 U.S.). Artem was temporarily detained and interrogated on March 20, 2019, after Federal Security Service (FSB) officers raided eight homes of Jehovah's Witnesses in the Crimean cities of Alupka and Yalta. During the searches, officers seized computers and other electronic devices along with Bibles. Subsequently, FSB investigators charged Artem with organizing extremist activities, merely for meeting with others to discuss the Bible. Artem will appeal his conviction.

Criminalization of Jehovah's Witnesses in Crimea (Since 2017)

Convicted and sentenced to prison: 10

Pretrial detention: 26

Total convicted: 31

Total still under investigation: 316

Jarrold Lopes

Communications Officer and Spokesman

Office of Public Information | Newsroom

World Headquarters of Jehovah's Witnesses

New York, USA

CRIMEA: "Unjustifiable to jail someone for reading the Bible"

By Felix Corley

Forum 18 (05.03.2020) - <https://bit.ly/2VNCjnK> - Jehovah's Witness Sergei Filatov was today sentenced to six years jail with an additional five years additional restrictions, and his co-believer Artyom Gerasimov was in a separate trial fined about two year's average salary. "I'm outraged, because it is unjustifiable to jail someone for reading the Bible," Filatov told Forum 18 before the sentence.

Two men from Yalta and Dzhankoi have become the first Jehovah's Witnesses in Russian-occupied Crimea to be convicted under Russia's Extremism Law for exercising their freedom of religion and belief. Today (5 March), the District Court in the northern Crimean town of Dzhankoi sentenced 47-year-old Sergei Filatov to six years in a labour camp ("general-regime prison colony"). The City Court in the southern Crimean town of Yalta fined 35-year-old Artyom Gerasimov 400,000 Roubles, or about two year's average salary for those in work.

Prisoner of conscience Filatov was taken into custody straight from the courtroom. He intends to appeal, Jehovah's Witnesses told Forum 18 on 5 March. Prisoner of conscience Filatov told Forum 18 that he was expecting the jail sentence. "I'm outraged, because it is unjustifiable to jail someone for reading the Bible," he told Forum 18 three days before the sentence (see below).

Filatov's six-year jail term will be followed by a five-year ban on engaging in educational activity, "activities relating to speeches and publications in mass media", and posting information on the internet, and one year of unspecified restrictions on freedom, according to the Dzhankoi District Court website. Such restrictions typically include being unable to leave one's home town, move house, or change one's job without informing probation authorities.

In his final court statement, prisoner of conscience Filatov said: "The prosecution claims that .. I conducted a service in my house, namely, I sang songs of praise to God, said a prayer, [and] read and discussed the Book of the Prophet Daniel, as well as scriptural publications and videos. And this is my 'extremism'! And this despite the fact that not one of the songs, not one of the videos, and even less so the Book of the Prophet Daniel, is banned in Russia!"

"This [legal] process .. makes it completely impossible to understand how, from the point of view of the prosecutor's office, I should behave as a law-abiding citizen professing the Jehovah's Witness religion, in order .. to satisfy my spiritual needs and realise my inalienable fundamental rights to freedom of conscience and religion".

Gerasimov was fined 400,000 Roubles, the minimum fine under Criminal Code Article 282.2 Part 1 equivalent to two years average wages "merely for meeting with others to discuss the Bible". No other punishment appears to have been imposed, and he intends to challenge his conviction, Jehovah's Witnesses say (see below).

In his final statement to the Court, Gerasimov stated that one investigator "repeatedly stated that in Russia there is not a single prohibited religion, but at the same time he considers my conversation about the Bible in the park to be illegal". "Therefore", Gerasimov continued, "the investigation allows only the first part of Article 28 [of the Russian Constitution] to be used, which states that I have the right to choose and have a

faith, but prohibits the use of the second part .. to profess and act in accordance with my convictions" (see below).

Filatov and Gerasimov had been charged 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"). In January 2019, Crimean Muslim prisoner of conscience Renat Suleimanov was jailed for four years, also under Article 282.2 Part 1, for meeting openly in mosques with three friends to discuss their faith (see below).

Russia's March 2014 annexation of Crimea is not recognised by Ukraine or internationally.

Criminal convictions and jailings or fines of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia are widespread.

Prisoner of conscience Filatov was jailed at the 22nd hearing in his trial. Only three or four of these hearings were open to the public. "About 100 of my friends came to support me at each hearing, standing outside the court," he told Forum 18 from Dzhankoi on 2 March, three days before his 5 March conviction (see below).

Prosecutor Aleksandr Onishchuk demanded that Filatov be given a strict regime jail term of seven years. On 4 March Onishchuk refused to discuss with Forum 18 why he thinks Filatov deserved conviction and such a long sentence (see below).

Two other Jehovah's Witnesses in Russian-occupied Crimea face "extremism"-related criminal charges. Russian state officials again raided the home of one of them, Taras Kuzio, on 13 February. An FSB security service official present during the raid put the phone down as soon as Forum 18 asked why it had been launched (see below).

"It is sad that the massive repression of faith, which has been unleashed by security services in dozens of regions of Russia, has reached Crimea," Jehovah's Witness spokesperson Yaroslav Sivulskiy stated on 5 March. "Sergei Filatov was convicted of a grave criminal offence, as a dangerous enemy of the state, for a simple family worship service. The case is obviously trumped up. The investigation did not try to conceal its falsifications in the case, and the court clearly sympathised with the prosecution".

First Crimean Jehovah's Witnesses to be convicted

Gerasimov and Filatov are the first Jehovah's Witnesses convicted in Russian-occupied Crimea on "extremism"-related criminal charges to punish them for exercising freedom of religion or belief.

Both Gerasimov and Filatov were jailed under Russian Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 1. In both cases the Russian FSB security service initiated the criminal cases. Neither was held in pre-trial detention, but both were under travel restrictions, having to sign pledges not to leave the area as the cases were being investigated and once the trials began.

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". The maximum punishment under Part 1 of this Article is 10 years' imprisonment.

Dzhankoi Jehovah's Witness Sergei Filatov jailed

On 5 March, Judge Mariya Yermakova at Dzhankoi District Court found Crimean Jehovah's Witness Sergei Viktorovich Filatov (born 6 June 1972) guilty of "continuing the activities of a banned extremist organisation".

Prisoner of conscience Filatov was jailed at the 22nd hearing in his trial. Only three or four of these hearings were open to the public. "About 100 of my friends came to support me at each hearing, standing outside the court," he told Forum 18 from Dzhankoi on 2 March, three days before his 5 March conviction.

Filatov was taken into custody directly from the courtroom, and will remain in detention while his appeal is pending.

Prisoner of conscience Filatov's six-year labour camp term will be followed by a five-year ban on engaging in educational activity, "activities relating to speeches and publications in mass media", and posting information on the internet, and one year of unspecified restrictions on freedom, according to the Dzhankoi District Court website. Such restrictions typically include being unable to leave one's home town, move house, or change one's job without informing probation authorities.

Prosecutor Aleksandr Onishchuk had demanded that Filatov be given a strict regime jail term of seven years. On 4 March, the day before the verdict was handed down, Onishchuk refused to discuss why he thinks Filatov deserved a conviction and long sentence. "It will be necessary for you to study the verdict once it is handed down," he told Forum 18 from Dzhankoi. As of 5 March, no written verdict is yet publicly available.

Asked whether he had been told what sentence to demand, Prosecutor Onishchuk responded: "Under the law prosecutors take their decisions independently." He refused to discuss Filatov's case further without permission from the District Prosecutor and put the phone down.

Filatov told Forum 18 on 2 March that he was expecting to be jailed. "Given the situation, I fear it will be a real jail term," he told Forum 18. "I'm outraged, because it is unjustifiable to jail someone for seven years for reading the Bible. What am I guilty of?"

"I know for sure that I did not commit any crime, either against God, or before Caesar – that is, before the state", Filatov said in his final statement to the court on 28 February. "I am judged because I am a Christian and consider my faith to be true".

"The prosecution claims that .. I conducted a service in my house, namely, I sang songs of praise to God, said a prayer, [and] read and discussed the Book of the Prophet Daniel, as well as scriptural publications and videos. And this is my `extremism"! And this despite the fact that not one of the songs, not one of the videos, and even less so the Book of the Prophet Daniel, is banned in Russia!"

"This [legal] process .. makes it completely impossible to understand how, from the point of view of the prosecutor's office, I should behave as a law-abiding citizen professing the Jehovah's Witness religion, in order .. to satisfy my spiritual needs and realise my inalienable fundamental rights to freedom of conscience and religion". Closed hearings on 25 and 28 February heard the final speeches in the case.

The Crimean Prosecutor's Office has not replied to Forum 18's 3 March questions asking why prosecutors had requested a jail sentence, who had been harmed by Filatov's actions, and why meetings for prayer and Bible reading were considered a criminal

offence. Forum 18 also pointed out that the Russian Supreme Court had outlawed Jehovah's Witness organisations, but not their beliefs.

"List of Terrorists and Extremists"

Filatov and Gerasimov are – like Crimean Jehovah's Witness facing criminal prosecution Viktor Stashevsky (see below) and Muslim prisoner of conscience Renat Suleimanov – on the Russian Federal Financial Monitoring Service (Rosfinmonitoring) "List of Terrorists and Extremists", whose accounts banks are obliged to freeze, apart from small transactions.

Filatov told Forum 18 that as he does not have a bank account the authorities could not freeze it.

Dzhankoi raids, prosecution

In November 2018, about 10 groups of Russian FSB officers, OMON riot police, and possibly officers of other agencies who had come from Simferopol raided the homes in Dzhankoi of eight families (including that of Filatov) who were members of the two local Jehovah's Witness communities before they were banned in 2017. Officers used violence against some of them, while a pregnant woman suffered a miscarriage following the raids.

The Russian FSB security service accused Filatov of "continuing the activity" of the local Jehovah's Witness community, which had been liquidated as "extremist". Filatov rejects the accusation against him. He told the Investigator that believers met together not as an organisation but as private individuals under the guarantees enshrined in the Russian Constitution. The criminal case reached court in September 2019.

Yalta Jehovah's Witness Artyom Gerasimov fined

On 5 March, Judge Vladimir Romanenko of Yalta City Court convicted another Crimean Jehovah's Witness, Artyom Vyacheslavovich Gerasimov (born 13 January 1985), on "extremism"-related criminal charges, "merely for meeting with others to discuss the Bible", Jehovah's Witness spokesperson Jarrod Lopes told Forum 18 on 5 March.

The prosecutor had asked for a jail term of six and a half years, plus one year of restrictions on freedom and a three-year ban on unspecified activities. Judge Romanenko fined Gerasimov 400,000 Roubles, the minimum fine under Criminal Code Article 282.2 Part 1 equivalent to two years average wages. No other punishment appears to have been imposed. Gerasimov intends to challenge his conviction, Jehovah's Witnesses say.

In court, Gerasimov insisted on his innocence, arguing that he had not been involved in any activities of the local Jehovah's Witness organisation after its liquidation in 2017.

He noted in his final statement to the court on 3 March that one investigator "repeatedly stated that in Russia there is not a single prohibited religion, but at the same time he considers my conversation about the Bible in the park to be illegal". "Therefore", Gerasimov continued, "the investigation allows only the first part of Article 28 [of the Russian Constitution] to be used, which states that I have the right to choose and have a faith, but prohibits the use of the second part .. to profess and act in accordance with my convictions."

"It's the same as giving a car to a person who does not have a driver's license. There is a car, but no right to use it", Gerasimov commented. "The religion of Jehovah's Witnesses is not prohibited, but there is no right to profess it!"

"I have no feelings of guilt", he concluded. "My conscience is clear both before God and before the state".

The Crimean Prosecutor's Office has not replied to Forum 18's 4 March questions asking why prosecutors had requested a jail sentence, who had been harmed by Gerasimov's actions, and why meetings for prayer and Bible reading were considered a criminal offence. Forum 18 also pointed out that the Russian Supreme Court had outlawed Jehovah's Witness organisations, but not their beliefs.

Yalta raids, prosecutions

In March 2019, Russian FSB investigators launched a criminal case against Gerasimov and Taras Grigoryevich Kuzio (see below) from the southern Crimean town of Yalta. Five days later, officers raided eight Jehovah's Witness family homes (including that of Gerasimov) in and around Yalta. Officers seized religious literature, money and other documents, and took several people for interrogation. Both Gerasimov and Kuzio had to sign a pledge not to leave the area. The criminal case reached court in September 2019.

February raid on Jehovah's Witness, one of two more facing prosecution

After a 13 February raid on the Yalta home of Jehovah's Witness Taras Grigoryevich Kuzio, and a 4 June 2019 raid on the Sevastapol home of Viktor Vladimirovich Stashevsky, both now face criminal prosecutions as Jehovah's Witnesses. An FSB security service official present during the February 2020 raid put the phone down as soon as Forum 18 asked why the raid had been launched.

Russia's "extremist" organisation bans applied in Crimea

Russia's Supreme Court banned Jehovah's Witnesses as "extremist" in 2017. Prosecutors in Russia were in January 2020 investigating more than 300 Russian Jehovah's Witnesses individuals on "extremism"-related criminal charges, of which 24 were in pre-trial detention.

Following Russia's March 2014 occupation of Crimea, the Russian authorities granted re-registration to all 22 Jehovah's Witness communities in Crimea, but in 2017 they were banned following the Russian Supreme Court ban.

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

In January 2019, a Simferopol court jailed Crimean Muslim prisoner of conscience Renat Suleimanov Suleimanov for four years on "extremism"-related charges for meeting openly in mosques with three friends to discuss their faith. The charges related to membership of the banned in Russia Muslim missionary movement Tabligh Jamaat.

In May 2019, the Russian authorities transferred Suleimanov from occupied Crimea to a labour camp in Russia. He arrived in Kamenka Labour Camp in Russia's Kabardino-Balkariya Region in June 2019 and was in July put into a punishment cell for an alleged conflict with another prisoner while being transferred from Crimea to the camp.

In early January 2020, Suleimanov was freed from the camp punishment cell after six months and placed him in the strict section of the camp. Suleimanov's lawyer insists the accusation of conflict with another prisoner was fabricated as an excuse to punish his client again.

CRIMEA: Six months in Russian prison punishment cell

By Felix Corley

Forum 18 (02.03.2020) - <https://bit.ly/38oz304> - In January, Crimean Muslim prisoner of conscience Renat Suleimanov completed six months in Russian labour camp punishment cell for an alleged conflict with another prisoner. He was then transferred to the camp's strict section. Suleimanov's lawyer insists the accusation was fabricated to punish his client. On 3 and 5 March, verdicts are expected in criminal cases against Jehovah's Witnesses Artyom Gerasimov and Sergei Filatov.

In early January, the Russian labour camp which is holding Crimean Muslim prisoner of conscience Renat Suleimanov freed him from the camp punishment cell after six months and placed him in the strict section of the camp. The camp administration claims he was punished for an alleged conflict with another prisoner while being transferred from Crimea to the camp in June 2019. Suleimanov's lawyer insists the accusation was fabricated as an excuse to punish his client.

Kamenka Labour Camp's administration in Russia's Kabardino-Balkariya Region again refused to explain why Suleimanov had been put in punishment cell for six months and why he is now being held in the strict block. "The law doesn't allow us to give this information," the official told Forum 18 (see below).

In January 2019 a Simferopol court jailed Suleimanov for four years on "extremism"-related charges for meeting openly in mosques with three friends to discuss their faith. The charges related to membership of the Muslim missionary movement Tabligh Jamaat, which Russia has banned (see below).

Russia's March 2014 annexation of Crimea is not recognised by Ukraine or internationally.

On the afternoon of 3 March 2020, a court in the southern Crimean town of Yalta is expected to issue its verdict in the "extremism"-related criminal case of Jehovah's Witness Artyom Gerasimov. The prosecutor has demanded a general regime jail term of six and a half years, plus one year of restrictions on freedom and a three-year ban on unspecified activity (see below).

On the morning of 5 March, the District Court in the northern Crimean town of Dzhankoi is expected to issue its verdict in the "extremism"-related criminal case of another Crimean Jehovah's Witness, Sergei Filatov. Closed hearings on 25 and 28 February heard the final speeches in the case. The prosecutor has demanded a strict regime jail term of seven years (see below).

If either Gerasimov or Filatov is convicted, they would be the first Jehovah's Witnesses convicted in Russian-occupied Crimea to punish them for exercising freedom of religion or belief (see below).

Two other Jehovah's Witnesses in Russian-occupied Crimea face "extremism"-related criminal charges. Russian security forces again raided the home of one of them on 13 February. An FSB security service present during the raid put the phone down as soon as Forum 18 asked why it had been launched (see below).

Meanwhile, the FSB security service Investigator has three times refused to grant

permission for Oleg Prikhodko to receive a pastoral visit in Simferopol Investigation Prison from Archbishop Kliment, of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine. The Investigator initially refused because the Church does not have Russian registration. His third refusal claimed such a pastoral visit might harm the investigation (see below).

"Extremist" organisations banned

Russia's Supreme Court banned the Muslim missionary movement 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 were in January 2020 investigating more than 300 Russian Jehovah's Witnesses individuals on "extremism"-related criminal charges, of which 24 were in pre-trial detention.

Following Russia's March 2014 occupation of Crimea, the Russian authorities granted re-registration to all 22 Jehovah's Witness communities in Crimea. But in 2017 they were banned following the Russian Supreme Court ban.

Suleimanov: Illegal transfer to Russian prison

Renat Rustemovich Suleimanov (born 30 August 1969), a Crimean Tatar, was born in exile in Kazakhstan's then capital Almaty. When the Crimean Tatars were allowed to return to Crimea, he settled in the village of Molodezhnoe just north of Crimea's capital Simferopol. He is married with three young daughters.

Suleimanov and three friends met openly in mosques to discuss their faith. "At lessons we studied ayats [verses] from the Koran, the value of praying the namaz, and the zikr [reciting devotional phrases as a reminder of Allah]," one of the men told the court at their trial. "These lessons were not conspiratorial and took place in mosques."

After Suleimanov spent more than 15 months in pre-trial detention following his October 2017 arrest by the Russian FSB security service, the Crimean Supreme Court jailed him for four years in January 2019. He was punished on "extremism"-related charges for alleged Tabligh Jamaat membership.

Three others on trial with Suleimanov were given two and a half year suspended sentences, when they will live under restrictions.

In May 2019, the Russian authorities transferred Suleimanov from occupied Crimea to a labour camp in Russia. He arrived in Kamenka Labour Camp in Russia's Kabardino-Balkariya Region in June 2019 and was in July put into a punishment cell.

The Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War covers the rights of civilians in territories occupied by another state (described as "protected persons"). Article 76 includes the provision: "Protected persons accused of offences shall be detained in the occupied country, and if convicted they shall serve their sentences therein."

One of Suleimanov's two cases to the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) in Strasbourg is over his illegal transfer from Ukraine (occupied Crimea) to Russia (see below).

Suleimanov: Six months in prison punishment cell

In early January 2020, Kamenka Labour Camp's administration released Suleimanov from the punishment cell, where he had spent six months, his lawyer Roman Martynovskyy told Forum 18 from the Ukrainian capital Kiev. The Labour Camp's administration then transferred Suleimanov to the strict section of the camp.

Prisoners in the strict section have greater restrictions on their movement within the camp, including needing permission to visit other sections of the camp, and are allowed fewer parcels and visits from outside the prison.

Kamenka Labour Camp's administration sent Suleimanov to the punishment cell in early July 2019 to punish him for allegedly getting into a conflict with another prisoner during his transfer from Crimea to prison in Russia. "It is not true," Martynovskyy insisted to Forum 18. "This was fabricated by the convoy guards."

The Special Department of the Labour Camp's administration again refused to explain why Suleimanov had been put in punishment cell for six months and why he is being held in the strict section of the camp. "The law doesn't allow us to give this information," the official repeatedly told Forum 18 on 20 February, before putting the phone down.

Forum 18 was therefore unable to find out whether Suleimanov has access to the Koran and other religious literature, and whether he can pray unimpeded.

The United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (known as the Mandela Rules – A/C.3/70/L.3) requires governments to respect the freedom of religion and belief and other human rights of prisoners. This includes access to religious texts and the freedom to pray individually and to meet for worship with others.

Suleimanov's labour camp address is:

361424 Kabardino-Balkariya
Chegemsky raion
Pos. Kamenka
Ul. D.A. Mizieva 1
Ispravitelnaya Koloniya No. 1
Suleimanovu Renatu Rustemovichu

Suleimanov: European Court of Human Rights cases

Prisoner of conscience Renat Suleimanov has lodged two cases against Russia at the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) in Strasbourg, the Court told Forum 18.

Suleimanov lodged the first case on 16 October 2019 (Application No. 56354/19). He argues that the Russian authorities violated his rights under Article 6 ("Right to a fair trial"), Article 7 ("No punishment without law"), Article 9 ("Freedom of thought, conscience and religion"), Article 10 ("Freedom of expression"), Article 11 ("Freedom of assembly and association") and Article 13 ("Right to an effective remedy") of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.

Suleimanov lodged the second case on 18 November 2019 (Application No. 64404/19), complaining that his transfer from Ukraine (occupied Crimea) to a prison in Russia was illegal under Article 3 Protocol 4 of the Convention and of inhumane treatment in prison (Article 3).

Two Jehovah's Witness verdicts imminent

On the afternoon of 3 March, Judge Vladimir Romanenko at Yalta City Court is expected to issue his verdict in the "extremism"-related criminal case of Jehovah's Witness Artyom Vyacheslavovich Gerasimov (born 13 January 1985), according to court records. The prosecutor has demanded a jail term of six and a half years, plus one year of restrictions on freedom and a three-year ban on unspecified activity.

On the morning of 5 March, Judge Mariya Yermakova at Dzhankoi District Court is expected to issue her verdict in the "extremism"-related criminal case of another Crimean Jehovah's Witness Sergei Viktorovich Filatov (born 6 June 1972), according to court records. Closed hearings on 25 and 28 February heard the final speeches in the case. The prosecutor has demanded a strict regime jail term of seven years.

If either Gerasimov or Filatov is convicted, they would be the first Jehovah's Witnesses convicted in Russian-occupied Crimea to punish them for exercising freedom of religion or belief.

Both Gerasimov and Filatov are on trial under Russian Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 1. In both cases the Russian FSB security service initiated the criminal cases. Neither was held in pre-trial detention, but both were under travel restrictions, having to sign pledges not to leave the area as the cases were being investigated and once the trials began.

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". The maximum punishment under Part 1 of this Article is 10 years' imprisonment.

In March 2019, Russian FSB investigators launched a criminal case against Gerasimov and Taras Grigoryevich Kuzio (see below) from the southern Crimean town of Yalta. Five days later, officers raided eight Jehovah's Witness family homes (including that of Gerasimov) in and around Yalta. Officers seized religious literature, money and other documents, and took several people for interrogation. Both Gerasimov and Kuzio had to sign a pledge not to leave the area. The criminal case reached court in September 2019.

In November 2018, about 10 groups of Russian FSB officers, OMON riot police, and possibly officers of other agencies who had come from Simferopol raided the homes in Dzhankoi of eight families (including that of Filatov) who were members of the two local Jehovah's Witness communities before they were banned in 2017. Officers used violence against some of them, while a pregnant woman suffered a miscarriage following the raids.

The Russian FSB security service accused Filatov of "continuing the activity" of the local Jehovah's Witness community, which had been liquidated as "extremist". Filatov rejects the accusation against him. He told the Investigator that believers meet together not as an organisation but as private individuals under the guarantees enshrined in the Russian Constitution. The criminal case reached court in September 2019.

New raid on Jehovah's Witness, one of two more facing prosecution

On 13 February 2020, Russian security forces raided the home in the southern Crimean town of Yalta of Jehovah's Witness Taras Grigoryevich Kuzio (born 19 June 1978). Officers intended to use a grinding machine to break into his home, but he reached the door to let them in before they could force entry, Jehovah's Witnesses told Forum 18.

Officers – who were led by Lieutenant S. Gainiev of the Russian FSB security service's

Crimean branch, and accompanied by local officer Senior Lieutenant P. Shurupov – read out a court order authorising a house search. However, they refused to give Kuzio a copy. Officers seized electronic devices and personal notes.

Asked by Forum 18 on 2 March why he and other FSB officers raided Kuzio's home, Senior Lieutenant Shurupov put the phone down.

Officers had earlier tried and failed to find any banned materials in Kuzio's home.

Viktor Vladimirovich Stashevsky (born 11 July 1966), a resident of the port city of Sevastopol, is also facing criminal prosecution as a Jehovah's Witness. On 4 June 2019, Russian FSB investigators launched a criminal case against him. That evening, FSB officers raided at least nine local homes, with a further follow-up raid on 7 July 2019. He had to sign a pledge not to leave the area.

The Russian FSB Investigator handling Stashevsky's case - Lieutenant Aleksandr Chumakin (who was also the initial FSB investigator on Filatov's case) – did not answer his phone on 28 February.

Jehovah's Witnesses Filatov, Gerasimov, and Stashevsky, as well as Muslim prisoner of conscience Renat Suleimanov, are on the Russian Federal Financial Monitoring Service (Rosfinmonitoring) "List of Terrorists and Extremists", whose accounts banks are obliged to freeze, apart from small transactions.

Prikhodko: Denied prison visit from priest of his choice

Oleg Prikhodko is a 61-year-old from Saki on Crimea's western coast, accused of preparing acts of terrorism, charges he denies. He has been held since October 2019 in pre-trial detention at Simferopol's Investigation Prison No. 1.

The Russian FSB security service, which is investigating Prikhodko's case, has three times refused his application for a prison visit from Archbishop Kliment (Kushch) of Simferopol and Crimea. "The most recent denial of permission came in late January 2020," Prikhodko's lawyer Nazim Sheikmambetov told Forum 18 on 20 February.

"Oleg is a member of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine and wants to conduct religious rites with Archbishop Kliment," Sheikmambetov added. "He said that on religious grounds he is not prepared to accept other priests."

However, the Russian FSB Investigator's response claimed that Prikhodko could not meet third parties because it might harm the continuing investigation, Sheikmambetov told Forum 18.

Prikhodko asked twice in 2019 for Archbishop Kliment to be allowed to make a pastoral visit, but these requests were both denied, Radio Free Europe's Crimean Realities noted on 30 December 2019.

"In his earlier refusal, the Investigator had claimed that the religious organisation Kliment represents is not registered," Prikhodko's lawyer Sheikmambetov told Forum 18 on 20 February 2020.

The Orthodox Church of Ukraine does not have registration in Crimea under Russian law. It initially decided it would not seek registration under Russian law in occupied Crimea. In March 2019 it tried to register its Simferopol parish as an independent community. The Crimean Justice Ministry issued three successive refusals to register the community in 2019. This means that the Russian authorities do not recognise the community as legally

existing.

"Access to a qualified representative of any religion shall not be refused to any prisoner," declares Rule 65 of the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (known as the Mandela Rules – A/C.3/70/L.3), which require governments to respect the freedom of religion and belief and other human rights of prisoners.

The Special Department of Simferopol's Investigation Prison No. 1 insisted to Forum 18 on 28 February that "we don't decide, it is the FSB". The official – who did not give her name – added that the prison has a priest, "but he didn't ask for him". Told that the prison has a responsibility to ensure access by a representative of the religion that the prisoner chooses, she put the phone down. (END)

More Jehovah's Witnesses tortured this month

By Victoria Arnold

Forum 18 (27.02.2020) - <https://bit.ly/3cvRnaV> - Jehovah's Witnesses state that this month (February 2020), prison guards tortured five of their prisoners of conscience in the Urals city of Orenburg, and National Guard officers tortured two adherents in the Siberian city of Chita. The torture included beatings, choking and electric shocks. No officials have yet been arrested for the tortures.

Jehovah's Witnesses have complained that officials have tortured more of their adherents this month (February 2020). They say prison guards tortured five of their prisoners of conscience in the Urals city of Orenburg, and National Guard officers tortured two adherents in the Siberian city of Chita. The torture included beatings, choking and electric shocks, they add.

Five Jehovah's Witnesses - Aleksey Budenchuk, Feliks Makhammadiyev, Roman Gridasov, Gennady German, and Aleksey Miretsky - imprisoned in Orenburg Labour Camp ("corrective colony") No. 1 have said that they were tortured on arrival on 6 February 2020.

The five Labour Camp No. 1 prisoners of conscience state that, while they were being admitted, guards kicked them and beat them with batons. When they searched the prisoners, the guards also took away the gluten-free food given by doctors to Makhammadiyev. As he has coeliac disease, it is essential that he has gluten-free food (see below).

Labour Camp staff then put all five prisoners of conscience in solitary confinement on "ridiculous false charges", Jehovah's Witnesses said on 15 February. One of the allegations was "smoking in the wrong place", even though Jehovah's Witnesses do not smoke for religious reasons (see below).

Because of the pain caused by the torture, prisoner of conscience Makhammadiyev "could not sleep on his side and his temperature rose", Jehovah's Witnesses told Forum 18 on 18 February. "After the guards forced him to sign a document that he was injured through his own fault, they immediately called an ambulance and he was taken to hospital" (see below).

In hospital, Makhammadiyev underwent surgery and had a drain inserted to drain fluid from his lung. Tests showed that he had also broken a rib and had a damaged kidney. On

20 February, Jehovah's Witnesses stated that the drain had been removed and Makhammadiyev was recovering. He is now being held in the Labour Camp's medical unit (see below).

The Federal Prison Service in Moscow claimed to Forum 18: "Nobody was beaten in Orenburg Labour Camp No. 1. Information in the press does not correspond to reality". However, Orenburg Deputy Regional Prosecutor Andrey Vyazikov told Forum 18 on 26 February that "on the basis of information received about the injuries of one of the inmates, a prosecutorial review has been organised", after which prosecutors would determine whether "unlawful methods of physical pressure" had been used against prisoners (see below).

After raids on 40 homes in the Siberian city of Chita in the early morning of 10 February, another Jehovah's Witness – Vadim Kutsenko – said that members of the National Guard subjected him to beating, choking, and electric shocks after they arrested him. Another detainee said that the National Guard made threats of violence against their family (see below).

Kutsenko has since been released from custody, but remains under investigation under 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") alongside three fellow Chita residents. One of them is under house arrest (see below).

Transbaikal Region Investigative Committee is investigating Kutsenko's accusation of torture (see below).

"The victims have complained to various authorities about all the law enforcement agents' actions," Jehovah's Witnesses told Forum 18 on 18 February. They said they do not know whether any of those responsible have been punished.

Officials suspected of torturing Muslims and Jehovah's Witnesses in earlier cases also do not appear to have been either arrested or put on criminal trial for torture, as Russia's international human rights obligations require (see forthcoming F18News article).

Ignoring international obligations

Under the United Nations (UN) Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, Russia is obliged to both arrest any person suspected on good grounds of having committed torture and also try them under criminal law which makes "these offences punishable by appropriate penalties which take into account their grave nature".

Torture nevertheless remains common. The UN Committee Against Torture's (CAT) August 2018 Concluding Observations (CAT/C/RUS/CO/6) on Russia stated that it is "deeply concerned at numerous reliable reports of the practice of torture and ill-treatment in the State party, including as a means to extract confessions, and at many recent reports documenting cases of torture .. The Committee is also concerned at reports that allegations of torture rarely resulted in criminal prosecutions and that, even when prosecuted, the perpetrators were charged with simple assault or abuse of authority." The CAT also urged Russia "to combat impunity in torture and ill-treatment cases".

One in 10 people who replied to a survey of 3,447 adults from across Russia said they had been tortured by police or other security officers, according to a survey published on

27 June 2019 by independent Moscow-based polling body the Levada-Centre. Three-quarters of adults who said they had suffered torture stated that they had been tortured to humiliate or intimidate them, half that they had been tortured to extract confessions, and a third that they had been tortured as a punishment.

Orenburg: Torture leading to hospitalisation, solitary confinement

Five Jehovah's Witness prisoners of conscience - Aleksey Budenchuk, Feliks Makhammadiyev, Roman Gridasov, Gennady German, and Aleksey Miretsky - said that they were beaten on arrival in Orenburg Labour Camp No. 1 on 6 February 2020. One of them was so badly tortured that he was hospitalised with damage to his lungs and kidneys, and a broken rib.

Budenchuk, Makhammadiyev, Gridasov, German and Miretsky were all jailed for between two years and three and a half years at a court in their home town of Saratov on 19 September 2019. Jehovah's Witnesses commented that this "equates peaceful believers with dangerous criminals".

Saratov Region Prosecutor's Office did not reply to Forum 18's questions as to why it considered these men dangerous and should be jailed.

The jail sentences entered legal force on 20 December 2019, after Saratov Regional Court rejected their appeals.

"Since the transfer of prisoners is a slow process, associated with the preparation of all documents and the solution of other technical issues, they arrived at [Labour Camp No. 1 in Orenburg] only on 6 February 2020," Jehovah's Witnesses told Forum 18 on 18 February.

The five Orenburg prisoners of conscience state that, while they were being admitted to the Labour Camp, guards kicked them and beat them with batons. When they searched the prisoners, the guards also took away the gluten-free food doctors had given Makhammadiyev. As he has coeliac disease, it is essential that he has gluten-free food. A doctor examined the men's injuries only the next day.

Subjecting prisoners to physical torture immediately on arrival (a practice known as "reception", priyomka) appears to be common in Russia's prison system. In December 2019, for instance, Roman Sarychev, an inmate arriving at Labour Camp No. 6 in Bryansk Region, died after being beaten so badly by guards that his spleen ruptured. In January 2020, the human rights organisation Public Verdict published a video of Khasdin Murtazaliyev being beaten on his admission to a prison camp in Yaroslavl Region in 2016. In both these cases, criminal investigations of the alleged perpetrators are underway.

Guards at the Orenburg Labour Camp then put all five Jehovah's Witness prisoners of conscience in solitary confinement on "ridiculous false charges", Jehovah's Witnesses said on 15 February. One of the allegations was "smoking in the wrong place", even though Jehovah's Witnesses do not smoke for religious reasons.

On 18 October 2011 the then-United Nations (UN) Special Rapporteur on Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment Juan Mendez condemned the use of solitary confinement, stating it could amount to torture. "Segregation, isolation, separation .. whatever the name, solitary confinement should be banned by States as a punishment or extortion technique".

Because of the pain caused by the torture, prisoner of conscience Makhammadiyev "could not sleep on his side and his temperature rose", Jehovah's Witnesses told Forum 18 on

18 February. "He was examined by a doctor, who immediately realised that Feliks was seriously injured. After the guards forced him to sign a document stating that he was injured through his own fault, they immediately called an ambulance and he was taken to hospital."

In hospital, Makhammadiyev underwent surgery and doctors inserted a drain to drain fluid from his lung. Tests showed that he also had a broken rib and a damaged kidney. On 20 February, Jehovah's Witnesses reported that doctors had removed the drain and Makhammadiyev was recovering. He is now being held in the Labour Camp's medical unit.

Orenburg: "Information .. does not correspond to reality"

Forum 18 wrote to Labour Camp No. 1 in Orenburg, the Orenburg Regional Prison Service, and the Federal Prison Service in Moscow in the afternoon of 19 February, asking why the guards had tortured the Jehovah's Witnesses, whether their actions would be investigated, and whether Budenchuk, Miretsky, German, and Gridasov were still in solitary confinement.

The Federal Prison Service replied the same day that "Nobody was beaten in Orenburg Labour Camp No. 1. Information in the press does not correspond to reality". It referred Forum 18 to the Regional Prison Service's official statement of 15 February.

This statement claims that "information about the beating by employees of convicts serving sentences in [Labour Camp No. 1] is untrue. One of the convicts was injured through his own negligence. He immediately turned to the medical unit, where he was provided with the necessary assistance. At the moment, the convict is in the medical unit, [and his] state of health is satisfactory. An official inspection of the matter was carried out, [and] the explanations of the convict describe under what circumstances the injury was received. It was also reported to the prosecutor's office for supervision of compliance with laws in regional correctional facilities."

In a letter to Forum 18 dated 21 February, Sergei Porshin, head of the Orenburg Regional Prison Service, also claimed that no beatings had taken place and reiterated the official statement's description of the incident.

Deputy Regional Prosecutor Andrey Vyazikov on 26 February told Forum 18 that "on the basis of information received about the injuries of one of the inmates, a prosecutorial review has been organised", after which prosecutors would determine whether "unlawful methods of physical pressure" had been used against prisoners.

Vyazikov added that Central District Prosecutor's Office in Orenburg is overseeing a procedural investigation by an unnamed "investigative organ", which will determine whether a criminal case will be opened.

Neither the Regional Prison Service, nor Labour Camp No. 1, has replied to Forum 18's 19 February questions, as of the end of the working day in Orenburg of 27 February.

The telephone at Central District Prosecutor's Office went unanswered when Forum 18 called on 27 February to ask how far the investigation had progressed and when it was expected to end. Forum 18 also put these questions by email, but had received no response by the end of the working day on 27 February.

Orenburg Regional Human Rights Ombudsperson's Office has made no reply to Forum 18's 19 February questions about the torture as of the end of the Orenburg working day of 27 February.

Chita: Raid, torture

Early in the morning of 10 February, officials of the Investigative Committee, FSB security service, police, and National Guard (Rosgvardiya) raided 40 homes in Chita and several other towns and villages in the Transbaikal Region. They took 10 Jehovah's Witnesses away for questioning.

Such raids and detentions have become widespread in Russia.

After detaining him at the home of his parents-in-law, National Guard officers handcuffed Vadim Aleksandrovich Kutsenko (born 1989) and put him in a car. They there attempted to torture a "confession" out of him, Jehovah's Witnesses reported on 14 February.

The National Guard was established in 2016 as an internal military force reporting directly to the President. Its stated aims are border security, gun control, counter-terrorism, public order, and combating organised crime.

"They used a choking technique, and at that moment they started shocking him with an electric shock prod," Kutsenko's lawyer Artur Ganin told "The Insider" on 14 February. "Electric current was applied to the legs and stomach. They beat him on the face and spine. Vadim Aleksandrovich [already] had a neck injury, [and] he immediately told them about it and asked them not to torture him."

Kutsenko "was taken out of the car and kicked .. They tried to get a confession from him and force him to take all the blame on himself. When they realised that he was strong and would not break, they took him to an investigator. There, he reported torture, but the investigator .. sent him with the same officers to a temporary detention centre."

Kutsenko "immediately went for a medical examination, which confirmed the application of external traumatic impacts and marks from a stun gun", Jehovah's Witnesses told Forum 18 on 18 February.

Chita: Threats of violence

"The rest of the detainees were threatened," Kutsenko's lawyer Artur Ganin added. National Guard officers also threatened to inflict and video other forms of severe physical violence against the family of one of the detainees. The lawyer added: "They only experienced this because they were Jehovah's Witnesses."

Kutsenko and fellow Jehovah's Witnesses Pavel Rafitovich Mamalimov (born 1972) and Sergey Nikolayevich Kirilyuk (born 1972) spent five days in temporary detention. Ingodinsky District Court extended the usual period of 48 hours on 12 February.

A fourth man, Vladimir Vladimirovich Yermolayev (born 1988), was sent home on 12 February under house arrest and has since been charged. Kutsenko, Mamalimov, and Kirilyuk were all released without charge on 15 February, but remain suspects in a criminal case under 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"). They are currently under no known restrictions.

Other suspects in the criminal case are Igor Rafitovich Mamalimov (born 1976) and Aleksandr Nikolayevich Putintsev (born 1974).

Another young man, 17-year-old Aleksandr Karpov, says that he also was subjected to torture, when National Guard officers beat him during the search of his home.

Kutsenko complained to the Prosecutor's Office, the Investigative Committee, and the federal Human Rights Ombudsperson Tatyana Moskalkova about his torture. Jehovah's Witnesses noted that the Investigative Committee is examining his statement: "Kutsenko is now giving evidence to investigators."

Chita: No answers, no actions against officials suspected of torture?

The Transbaikal Region branch of the National Guard has not replied to Forum 18's questions, sent before the beginning of the working day of 19 February, asking whether a criminal case would be opened against the officers involved in Kutsenko's case, and why officers tortured the Jehovah's Witnesses.

Neither the Transbaikal Regional Investigative Committee, nor the Regional Prosecutor's Office has responded to Forum 18's questions, also sent on 19 February, as of the end of the Transbaikal working day of 27 February.

The regional Investigative Committee issued a press release on 10 February, stating that a criminal case had been opened against Jehovah's Witnesses in Transbaikal Region who allegedly "took active steps to continue illegal activities, including organising meetings, [making] religious speeches, collecting donations, and giving public sermons".

Neither in the press release nor subsequently has the regional Investigative Committee made any announcement of any arrest or criminal trial of National Guard officers suspected of torture, as should take place in line with Russia's legally binding international human rights obligations.

The Transbaikal Regional Human Rights Ombudsperson's Office has not replied to Forum 18's questions, sent before the start of the working day of 20 February, asking whether the National Guard officers' actions would be investigated and by whom, whether the officers were still on duty, and how likely it is that a criminal case will be opened.

CRIMEA: 35 "anti-missionary" prosecutions in 2019

By Felix Corley

Forum 18 (19.02.2020) - <https://bit.ly/2TGYvIS> - Prosecutions in Russian-occupied Crimea for ill-defined "missionary activity" in 2019 were at the same rate as in 2018. Of 24 prosecutions in 2019 for sharing faith or holding worship at unapproved venues, 17 ended in punishment (fines of five days' average wages). Also, 11 communities were prosecuted for not using their full legal name outside their meeting place or in religious literature.

In Russian-occupied Crimea in 2019 there were 24 prosecutions brought against 23 individuals and 1 community for ill-defined "missionary activity", of which 17 ended with punishment, Forum 18 has found. Many of those punished were prosecuted for holding worship at unapproved venues or for sharing their faith on the street. Further cases continue in early 2020.

This represents little change in the number of such cases in the Crimean peninsula, with 23 prosecutions in 2018 of which 19 ended in punishment. The first year such punishments for "missionary activity" were imposed - July 2016 to July 2017 - saw 13 known cases of which 8 ended in punishment.

"These punishments do have an impact," one member of a religious community in Crimea who was earlier fined for sharing their faith on the street told Forum 18 in January 2019. "Believers go out to share their faith less often, and give out publications or invitations less openly. It is a question not just of fines – if you don't pay then fines are doubled, then if you still don't pay they impose compulsory labour."

Russia's March 2014 annexation of Crimea is not recognised by Ukraine or internationally.

All 17 of the people punished in Crimea in 2019 – all Russian citizens – were fined about 5 days' average local wages each (Russian Administrative Code Article 5.26, Part 4 - "Russians conducting missionary activity").

No foreign citizens are known to have faced prosecution in Russian-occupied Crimea in 2019 under Russian Administrative Code Article 5.26, Part 5 - "Foreigners conducting missionary activity". In 2018, seven people – all longtime residents who are Ukrainian citizens - were punished for participating in religious meetings of a community they belonged to.

There were also 11 cases brought in Crimea in 2019 against 10 religious communities and 1 individual to punish them for failing to use the full legal name of a registered religious community (Russian Administrative Code Article 5.26, Part 3 - "Implementation of activities by a religious organisation without indicating its official full name, including the issuing or distribution, within the framework of missionary activity, of literature and printed, audio, and video material without a label bearing this name, or with an incomplete or deliberately false label").

Four of these 11 cases ended with fines of 30,000 Russian Roubles (one month's average local wages) each, and 2 defendants received a warning. The other 5 cases ended with no punishment. The communities known to have faced administrative cases are: 5 Protestant, 1 Muslim, 1 Messianic Jewish, 1 Seventh-day Adventist, 1 Hare Krishna and 1 Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

This represents little change in the number of such cases against religious communities in Crimea under Article 5.26, Part 3, with 12 cases against religious communities in 2018. In the first year of the imposition of such punishments – between July 2016 and July 2017 – Forum 18 found 14 such administrative cases, of which 8 ended in punishment.

A full listing of known 2019 cases in the administratively separate Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol - based on court decisions and court records seen by Forum 18 - is at the foot of this article.

Administrative prosecutions are also brought against those who have or are deemed to be in charge of religious literature the Russian authorities consider "extremist" or who hold unapproved public exercise of the right to freedom of religion or belief (see below).

Penalties for ill-defined "anti-missionary" activity

The 35 Russian Administrative Code cases in Crimea in 2019 were all brought under wide-ranging and ill-defined "anti-missionary" Russian legal changes made in July

2016. The Russian authorities immediately imposed these punishments in Crimea, which they occupied in March 2014.

Russian Administrative Code Article 5.26, Part 3 punishes the "Implementation of activities by a religious organisation without indicating its official full name, including the issuing or distribution, within the framework of missionary activity, of literature and printed, audio, and video material without a label bearing this name, or with an incomplete or deliberately false label". This incurs a fine of 30,000 to 50,000 Roubles and the confiscation of any literature or other material.

In upholding a Russian Pentecostal Pastor's appeal in November 2017, Russia's Supreme Court declared that Article 5.26, Part 3 does not apply to private individuals or people employed in an official capacity, only to legal entities. This may account for why the only case under this Part against an individual in Crimea in 2019 was returned (see list below).

Russian Administrative Code Article 5.26, Part 4 punishes "Russians conducting missionary activity". This incurs a fine of 5,000 to 50,000 Roubles. For organisations (legal entities), the fine is 100,000 to 1 million Roubles. Unregistered religious groups must notify the authorities of their existence, activities and membership but are not legal entities. Their members are therefore subject to prosecution as individuals.

Russian Administrative Code Article 5.26, Part 5 punishes "Foreigners conducting missionary activity". This incurs a fine of 30,000 to 50,000 Roubles with the possibility of expulsion from Russia.

Human rights defender Aleksandr Sedov of the Crimean Human Rights Group stated in 2017 that the punishments violate the rights to freedom of religion or belief enshrined in the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. He also pointed out that they also break the Geneva Convention (IV) relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, which enshrines the rights of civilians in occupied territories.

Tight Russian freedom of religion and belief restrictions

Since the March 2014 Russian annexation of Crimea, local religious communities which wanted to continue to function had to re-register under Russian law. Many were forced to restructure themselves to meet Russian requirements. This usually entailed cutting ties to their fellow-believers elsewhere in Ukraine.

Individuals and religious communities in Crimea were also subjected to the web of restrictions on exercising freedom of religion or belief enshrined in Russian law. They have faced raids, fines, religious literature seizures, government surveillance, expulsions of invited foreign religious leaders, unilateral cancellation of property rental contracts and obstructions to regaining places of worship confiscated in the Soviet period.

Prosecutions continue in 2020

Following a raid by Russian security forces on Friday prayers at a Simferopol mosque, Prosecutors brought a case against the Imam, Rasim Dervishev, under Russian Administrative Code Article 5.26, Part 4 ("Russians conducting missionary activity").

On 14 January 2020, Prosecutors handed the case against Imam Dervishev to Simferopol Magistrate's Court No. 13. His lawyer, Ayder Azamatov, argued in court that the Imam should not be punished for leading Friday prayers. The case is due to resume on 25 February (see forthcoming F18News article).

Among other 2020 cases is one brought against Simferopol's Vineyard Pentecostal Church under Russian Administrative Code Article 5.26, Part 3 ("Implementation of activities by a religious organisation without indicating its official full name, including the issuing or distribution, within the framework of missionary activity, of literature and printed, audio, and video material without a label bearing this name, or with an incomplete or deliberately false label").

Prosecutions for "extremist" religious literature, public religious events

Individuals are also fined for having or being deemed to be in charge of religious literature the Russian authorities consider "extremist".

Since the Russian annexation of Crimea, religious communities, libraries and individuals have repeatedly faced raids and punishment over religious literature which is banned as "extremist" but which does not appear to violate the human rights of others.

Officers – often armed – have raided numerous madrassahs (Muslim colleges), libraries, Muslim-owned homes and Jehovah's Witness meetings seizing such literature. Individuals have been punished under Russian Administrative Code Administrative Code Article 20.29 ("Production or mass distribution of extremist materials included in the published Federal List of Extremist Materials, as well as their production or storage for mass distribution").

Prosecutions are also brought in Crimea to punish exercise of freedom of religion or belief in public under Russian Administrative Code Article 20.2 ("Violation of the established procedure for organising or conducting a gathering, meeting, demonstration, procession or picket"), which is linked to the Demonstrations Law.

Prosecutors brought three separate cases against Sevastopol Hare Krishna devotee Aleksandr Kramarenko under Russian Administrative Code Article 20.2, Part 2 to punish him for singing mantras on the street with fellow devotees in December 2019. However, on 4 February 2020, Sevastopol's Lenin District Court sent the cases back because the records of an offence had not been correctly prepared, according to court records.

Kramarenko was among those fined in 2019 under Russia's "anti-missionary" laws (see list below).

Criminal cases also underway

In addition to these Russian Administrative Code cases, two individuals are known to be on trial to punish their exercise of freedom of religion or belief, with others also facing criminal prosecution.

On 20 February, Yalta City Court is expected to issue its verdict in the "extremism"-related criminal case of Jehovah's Witness Artyom Gerasimov. The prosecutor has demanded a jail term of six and a half years, plus one year of restricted freedom and a three-year ban on unspecified activity.

On 25 February, Dzhankoi District Court is due to hear the final speeches in the "extremism"-related criminal case of another Jehovah's Witness Sergei Filatov.

About 10 groups of FSB officers, OMON riot police and possibly officers of other agencies who had come from Simferopol then raided the homes in Dzhankoi of eight families (including that of Filatov) who were members of the two local Jehovah's Witness communities before they were banned in 2017. Violence was used against some of them, while a pregnant woman suffered a miscarriage following the raids.

Both Gerasimov and Filatov are on trial under Russian Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 1.

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".

After more than 15 months in pre-trial detention following his October 2017 arrest by the Russian FSB security service, the Crimean Supreme Court jailed local Muslim Renat Suleimanov for four years. He was punished on "extremism"-related charges for alleged Tabligh Jamaat membership. He is serving his sentence in a labour camp in Russia, where he has spent months in a prison punishment cell. Three others on trial with him were given two and a half year suspended sentences, when they will live under restrictions.

Known Russian Administrative Code Article 5.26 cases in Crimea in 2019

The list of known 2019 prosecutions under Russian Administrative Code Article 5.26, Parts 3 and 4, based on court records and other information (date of court hearing, name of individual/community, punishment, court, material on which prosecution based, appeal):

- Russian Administrative Code Article 5.26, Part 3 ("Implementation of activities by a religious organisation without indicating its official full name, including the issuing or distribution, within the framework of missionary activity, of literature and printed, audio, and video material without a label bearing this name, or with an incomplete or deliberately false label")

1) 15 February 2019

Name: Sevastopol Hare Krishna community

Punishment: none

Court: Sevastopol Magistrate's Court No. 10

Circumstances: Interior Ministry Centre for Countering Extremism accused community of meeting in premises without displaying sign with full community name. Acquitted

Appeal: none

2) 14 March 2019

Name: Ark of Salvation Protestant Church, Kerch

Punishment: none

Court: Kerch Magistrate's Court No. 44

Circumstances: Case returned 14 March 2019 (returned earlier on 13 February 2019)

Appeal: none

3) 21 March 2019

Name: I. Tkach

Punishment: none

Court: Saki Magistrate's Court No. 71

Circumstances: Unknown circumstances. Returned

Appeal: none

4) 1 April 2019

Name: Inkerman Missionary Church

Punishment: 30,000 Russian Roubles
Court: Balaklava Magistrate's Court No. 2
Circumstances: Held worship meeting with no sign giving full legal name
Appeal: none

5) 1 April 2019

Name: Inkerman Baptist Church

Punishment: none

Court: Balaklava Magistrate's Court No. 2

Circumstances: Interior Ministry Centre for Countering Extremism checked all its religious literature and found works which had not been marked with the community's full legal name. Acquitted, as literature used only within premises

Appeal: none

6) 22 April 2019

Name: Havah Nagilah (Let Us Rejoice) Messianic Jewish community

Punishment: 30,000 Russian Roubles

Court: Simferopol Magistrate's Court No. 16

Circumstances: Prosecutor's Office inspection during worship on Saturday 16 March 2019 found no sign giving full legal name

Appeal: none

7) 4 July 2019

Name: Razdolnoe Pentecostal Centre

Punishment: Official warning

Court: Razdolnoe Magistrate's Court No. 69

Circumstances: Prosecutor's Office inspected Church during worship on Sunday 30 June 2019. Church failed to display sign with full legal name

Appeal: none

8) 9 July 2019

Name: Khak Yol (Right Path) Muslim community, Verkhnyaya Kutuzovka

Punishment: Official warning

Court: Alushta Magistrate's Court No. 23

Circumstances: FSB instructed Prosecutor's Office to inspect community. Found lessons on Koran and Arabic taking place in yard of home without notice with full legal name of community. Transferred from Court No. 22 on 3 June 2019

Appeal: none

9) 12 July 2019

Name: Seventh-day Adventist Church

Punishment: none

Court: Simferopol Magistrate's Court No. 13

Circumstances: Case halted

Appeal: none

10) 1 November 2019

Name: Sevastopol Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

Punishment: 30,000 Russian Roubles

Court: Sevastopol Magistrate's Court No. 12

Circumstances: Prosecutor's Office inspection found religious literature and other materials which had not been marked with the community's full legal name

Appeal: Lodged at Sevastopol's Lenin District Court 17 January 2020; hearing due 4 March 2020

11) 13 November 2019

Name: God's Horizon Protestant Church, Sevastopol
Punishment: 30,000 Russian Roubles
Court: Sevastopol Magistrate's Court No. 13
Circumstances: Maintained pages on VKontakte and Facebook not showing full name of Church
Appeal: none

- Russian Administrative Code Article 5.26, Part 4 ("Russians conducting missionary activity")

1) 10 January 2019

Name: Vasily Olovyanishnikov
Punishment: 5,000 Russian Roubles
Court: Kerch Magistrate's Court No. 51
Circumstances: Leading Sunday worship of Pentecostal group in home after FSB requested investigation from Prosecutor's Office
Appeal: none

2) 16 January 2019

Name: Igor Ratnikov
Punishment: 5,000 Russian Roubles
Court: Sevastopol Magistrate's Court No. 12
Circumstances: Head of Messianic Jewish community led worship. Case documents included 3 witness statements and interrogation records of 31 individuals
Appeal: none

3) 18 January 2019

Name: Stanislav Negrulya
Punishment: 5,000 Russian Roubles
Court: Sevastopol Magistrate's Court No. 10
Circumstances: At least 2 people present at religious meeting of unknown affiliation were not members of the community
Appeal: none

4) 30 January 2019

Name: Andrei Tereshchenko
Punishment: none
Court: Simferopol Magistrate's Court No. 75
Circumstances: Hare Krishna devotee who had gathered for religious meeting with others in home visited by prosecutor's office officials in inspection. Acquitted, as prosecutor did not specify or prove in what way he had committed an "offence"
Appeal: none

5) 22 February 2019

Name: Sofiya Yanovskaya
Punishment: 5,000 Russian Roubles
Court: Simferopol Magistrate's Court No. 2
Circumstances: Offered Falun Gong literature in park to passers-by
Appeal: unsuccessful – 8 April 2019, Railway District Court, Simferopol; supervisory, unsuccessful – 20 June 2019, Crimean Supreme Court

6) 11 March 2019

Name: Natalya Ramaerisun
Punishment: 5,000 Russian Roubles
Court: Kerch Magistrate's Court No. 44
Circumstances: Prosecutor's Office inspected Ark of Salvation Protestant Church, Kerch,

during Sunday evening service 20 January 2019. Ramaerisun was conducting children's religious lessons.

Appeal: none

7) 11 March 2019

Name: Natalya Kuznetsova

Punishment: 5,000 Russian Roubles

Court: Kerch Magistrate's Court No. 44

Circumstances: Prosecutor's Office inspected Ark of Salvation Protestant Church, Kerch, during Sunday evening service 20 January 2019. Kuznetsova was conducting children's religious lessons.

Appeal: none

8) 25 March 2019

Name: Yuliya Shilyayeva

Punishment: 5,000 Russian Roubles

Court: Sevastopol Magistrate's Court No. 6

Circumstances: Published on social media materials about Tree of Life Pentecostal Church designed to attract new members

Appeal: none

9) 25 April 2019

Name: Abdulla Gemedzhi

Punishment: 5,000 Russian Roubles

Court: Simferopol Magistrate's Court No. 5

Circumstances: Led Friday prayers on 25 January 2019 in independent mosque claimed by the Crimean Muftiate ("conducted missionary activity in the form of a worship service"), where he has led prayers since 1995

Appeal: none

10) 30 April 2019

Name: Abdulla Gemedzhi

Punishment: none

Court: Simferopol Magistrate's Court No. 5

Circumstances: Led Friday prayers on 18 January 2019 in independent mosque. Case closed because it had passed deadline for consideration

Appeal: none

11) 26 April 2019

Name: Tatyana Pshenichnaya

Punishment: 5,000 Russian Roubles

Court: Kerch Magistrate's Court No. 47

Circumstances: FSB took books and leaflets of unknown international religious group from pensioner's presentation in library (transferred from Court No. 48)

Appeal: unsuccessful – 24 May 2019, Kerch City Court; rejected without consideration – 10 and 11 June 2019, Crimean Supreme Court

12) 30 April 2019

Name: Abdulla Gemedzhi

Punishment: 5,000 Russian Roubles

Court: Simferopol Magistrate's Court No. 5

Circumstances: Led Friday prayers on 1 February 2019 in independent mosque.

Appeal: none

13) 14 May 2019

Name: A. Nechiporuk (female)

Punishment: 5,000 Russian Roubles
Court: Sevastopol Magistrate's Court No. 6
Circumstances: Police Centre for Countering Extremism found her giving out leaflets with contact details for Sevastopol Christian Centre from Kemerovo
Appeal: none

14) 14 May 2019

Name: K. Nechiporuk (male)
Punishment: 5,000 Russian Roubles
Court: Sevastopol Magistrate's Court No. 6
Circumstances: Police Centre for Countering Extremism found him giving out leaflets with contact details for Sevastopol Christian Centre from Kemerovo
Appeal: none

15) 14 May 2019

Name: N. Yevdokimova
Punishment: 5,000 Russian Roubles
Court: Sevastopol Magistrate's Court No. 6
Circumstances: Police Centre for Countering Extremism found her giving out leaflets with contact details for Sevastopol Christian Centre from Kemerovo
Appeal: none

16) 4 July 2019

Name: Seventh-day Adventist Church
Punishment: none
Court: Simferopol Magistrate's Court No. 13
Circumstances: Case halted (transferred from Simferopol's Kiev District Court 4 June 2019)
Appeal: none

17) 16 July 2019

Name: Anastasiya Ivasyuk
Punishment: 5,000 Russian Roubles
Court: Simferopol Magistrate's Court No. 16
Circumstances: Distributed Hare Krishna literature without full name of religious organisation and answered questions on the faith from passers-by
Appeal: none

18) 6 August 2019

Name: Aleksei Sonin
Punishment: 5,000 Russian Roubles
Court: Sevastopol Magistrate's Court No. 14
Circumstances: Hare Krishna devotee, sang mantras in park
Appeal: rejected without consideration – 15 October 2019, Sevastopol City Court

19) 12 August 2019

Name: Aleksandr Kramarenko
Punishment: 5,000 Russian Roubles
Court: Sevastopol Magistrate's Court No. 14
Circumstances: Hare Krishna devotee, sang mantras in park
Appeal: none

20) 10 September 2019

Name: I. Kristya
Punishment: none
Court: Kerch Magistrate's Court No. 48

Circumstances: Case sent back
Appeal: none

21) 10 September 2019
Name: A. Saulidi
Punishment: none
Court: Kerch Magistrate's Court No. 48
Circumstances: Case sent back
Appeal: none

22) 30 September 2019
Name: Arsen Kantemirov
Punishment: none
Court: Simferopol Magistrate's Court No. 75
Circumstances: Imam of Salgir Baba Mosque in Zarechnoe, raided during Friday prayers by Russian security forces. Case dismissed because too much time had elapsed (earlier returned on 28 August 2019)
Appeal: none

23) 8 November 2019
Name: Aydar Islyamov
Punishment: 5,000 Russian Roubles
Court: Simferopol Magistrate's Court No. 76
Circumstances: Leading Friday prayers in a home in Ukrainka raided by armed Russian security personnel
Appeal: none

24) 16 December 2019
Name: Asan Bekirov
Punishment: none
Court: Simferopol Magistrate's Court No. 75
Circumstances: Led prayers at Salgir Baba Mosque in Zarechnoe raided during Friday prayers by Russian security forces. Case dismissed because too much time had elapsed (Case earlier returned on 12 November 2019)
Appeal: Simferopol District Court sent back Prosecutor's challenge without consideration, 24 January 2020

Special Bimonthly FORB Digest (15-28.02.2020)

News about Jehovah's Witnesses and other religious issues

As of February 18, 2020, there were

307 Jehovah's Witnesses under investigation and facing criminal charges
34 in prison (25 pretrial; 9 sentenced)
28 under house arrest
29 convicted (18 in 2019; 11 already in 2020)

27.02.2020 - More Jehovah's Witnesses tortured this month

Jehovah's Witnesses state that this month (February 2020), prison guards tortured five of their prisoners of conscience in the Urals city of Orenburg, and National Guard officers

tortured two adherents in the Siberian city of Chita. The torture included beatings, choking and electric shocks. No officials have yet been arrested for the tortures.

[Continue reading...](#)

27.02.2020 - Law enforcement authorities of Transbaikalia broke a sad record: on February 10, searches were conducted in 50 homes of believers

Link to the full text in Russian:

<https://www.jw-russia.org/news/2020/02/91.html>

Previous dubious records were noted in the cities of Sochi (36 searches) and Nizhny Novgorod (35 searches). In each of the raids, law enforcement officers from other regions participated. Since a 2017 Supreme Court ruling against Jehovah's Witnesses, by the end of February 2020, searches of their homes totaled 869.

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26.02.2020 - Jehovah's Witness in Belarus threatened with transfer to Russia

Link to the full text in Russian: <https://belaruspartisan.by/life/492282/>

The director of the Human Constanta rights advocacy center, Enira Bronitskaia, told Radio Liberty that a Jehovah's Witness from Russia was arrested on 21 February in Belarus. He is in the SIZO in Vitebsk. He is Nikolai N. According to the website of the Jehovah's Witnesses, a criminal case against him was opened in Russia on 31 January 2019 in Khanty-Mansi autonomous district

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26.02.20 - For first time, Belarus arrests believer wanted in Russia for belonging to Jehovah's Witnesses

Link to the full text in Russian: <https://credo.press/229368/>

Officials of law enforcement agencies in Belarus arrested a 36-year-old Russian, Nikolai Makhalichev, on 21 February. During inspection of his documents he was told that Russia had put him on an international wanted list, since he professes a "forbidden religion." Three days later, the prosecutor sent him to SIZO-2 in Vitebsk, according to a source among Russian Jehovah's Witnesses.

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26.02.20 - Jehovah's Witnesses in south Russia face delays of trial while in custody

Link to the full text in Russian: <https://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/346373/>

Around 400 persons gathered today at a cassation court in Piatigorsk in order to express support for Jehovah's Witnesses of Dagestan who are accused of extremism, the spouse of one of the believers who attended the trial reported. The court postponed the hearing

to 4 March because a video link with the believers from a detention cell in Mikhachkala was not established.

[Continue reading...](#)

25.02.2020 - Jehovah's Witness in occupied Ukrainian territory penalized by Russians

Link to the full text in Russian: <https://ru.krymr.com/a/news-rossiyskaya-prokuratura-zaprosila-7-let-zaklyucheniya-dlya-svidetelya-iyegovy-iz-dzhankoya/30453460.html>

The Russian prosecutor's office in the annexed Crimea asked for seven years incarceration for a resident of Dzhankoy, Sergei Filatov, who is charged with arranging the activity of a Jehovah's Witnesses religious organization that is forbidden in Russia.

[Continue reading...](#)

25.02.2020 - For the first time, Belarus authorities arrest one of Jehovah's Witnesses persecuted for his faith in Russia

Link to the full text in Russian: <https://www.jw-russia.org/news/2020/02/83.html>

On February 21, 2020, in the Republic of Belarus, police officers detained Russian citizen Nikolay Makhalichev, 36. Checking his documents, they declared he was wanted by the Russian authorities since he was professing a banned religion. Three days later the prosecutor sent him to pre-trial detention facility SIZO-2 in Vitebsk, Belarus.

[Continue reading...](#)

18.02.2020 - In Birobidzhan, the investigator accused eight of Jehovah's Witnesses. The number of criminal cases for faith in the city reaches 19

Link to the full text in Russian: <https://www.jw-russia.org/news/2020/02/66.html>

On February 6, 2020, in Birobidzhan, criminal cases were opened on suspicion of extremism against six women. Two other criminal cases, against Andrey Gubin and Oleg Postnikov, were opened on February 12. In total, 19 criminal cases were initiated against 22 believers in the city.

[Continue reading...](#)

15.02.2020 - Five believers were beaten in the Orenburg Colony. Feliks Makhammadiev has a broken rib, a damaged lung and kidney

Link to the full text in Russian: <https://www.jw-russia.org/news/2020/02/37.html>

On February 6, 2020, in Orenburg, officers of Penal Colony No. 1 beat believers Budenchuk, German, Gridasov, Makhammadiyev, and Miretskiy with clubs and legs. As a

result, one of them, Feliks Makhammadiyev, was hospitalized. The rest were falsely charged and sent to a punishment cell.

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A Russian Jehovah's Witness to be extradited from Belarus to Russia?

Human Rights Without Frontiers (Brussels) and Forum for Religious Freedom Europe (FOREF, Vienna) are urging the international community to advocate against this extradition

HRWF (26.02.2020) – A Russian Jehovah's Witness is under threat of being extradited from Belarus to Russia, a sinister precedent that must be urgently prevented, according to *Human Rights Without Frontiers* in Brussels and *Forum for Religious Freedom-Europe* (FOREF) in Vienna.

"The time for Belarus to stand up for religious freedom is now," the two organizations said.

Nikolay Andreyevich Makhlichev, born 1 July 1984 in the city of Cherepovets (Vologda Region), was arrested and detained on the territory of the Republic of Belarus on 21 February 2020 sometime after 3.30 p.m.

On 31 January 2019, Nikolai was charged under Article 282.2(1) of the Russian Criminal Code: "Organisation of the activity of a social or religious association or other organization 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." This article is related to the ban of the movement of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia since 2017 based on the law against extremism.

Since then Russian authorities have been actively searching for him. Russian police conducted searches in the home where he is registered, but could never find him because by then he had already relocated to another part of Russia. In May 2019, they placed him on the wanted list in an effort to arrest him.

Mr Makhlichev had traveled to Belarus in his car together with three other people. He was arrested and detained upon crossing the border when his car was stopped by a government automobile inspectorate as part of a standard traffic stop and his driver's license was taken to check for fines.

During the check, the officials asked for Mr Makhlichev's passport and found that he is wanted in Russia.

The law enforcement forces did not return his passport and told him he would be detained until Russian authorities replied back to them. They put him in their patrol car and took him to the Gorodokskiy DDIA (2) in the Vitebsk Region of the Republic of Belarus: g. Gorodok, ul. Krasnoarmeyskaya, d. 25. The prosecutor was notified that he had been detained.

On 21 February 2020 the investigator in charge of the case against N. A. Makhlichev in Russia was notified that he had been arrested and detained.

He will be held until the Republic of Belarus prosecutor's office receives the needed documents and an explanation from Russia. On this basis, it will be determined whether to turn him over to Russia or not.

On 22 February 2020 Mr Makhlichev, with the assistance of licensed lawyer V. A. Shuplyak, filed an application for asylum in the Republic of Belarus because he is being persecuted for his religious convictions in his country.

Between 2017 and 2020, about 250 Russian Jehovah's Witnesses have applied for asylum in Finland.

As of Monday, Feb 24, 2020

35 JW in prison (26 in pretrial detention; 9 convicted and serving time in prison)

25 JW under house arrest

29 JW convicted (9 imprisoned, 8 fined, 12 other restrictions)

See the detailed cases of all JW in prison in Russia in the Database of FORB Prisoners of Human Rights Without Frontiers:

<https://hrwf.eu/prisoners-database/>

200 Jehovah's Witnesses asylum-seekers since 2017

Jehovah's Witnesses getting a cold shoulder

By Pekka Vanttinen

EURACTIV (21.02.2020) - <https://bit.ly/2PaIM3k> - Out of the two hundred Jehovah's witnesses who came from Russia to apply for asylum in Finland since 2017, 90% have seen their applications rejected, according to the Finnish Immigration Service.

This means that a growing number of Jehovah's witnesses are being deported back to Russia while others are waiting in limbo.

Behind the phenomenon is ever tightening legislation in Russia against anything considered a threat to the status quo.

In 2016, Russia enacted new legislation against terrorism and a year later Jehovah's witnesses were named an extreme organisation and its activities were forbidden.

Among others, Amnesty International has reported the persecution faced by Jehovah's witnesses, who have, in some cases, even been tortured. The treatment of a religious group is in line with the situation of sexual minorities in Russia, something the European Court of Human Rights has strongly condemned.

HRWF Comment

As of February 18, 2020

307 Jehovah's Witnesses under investigation and facing criminal charges

34 in prison (25 pretrial; 9 sentenced)
28 under house arrest
29 convicted (18 in 2019; 11 already in 2020)

On 20 February, U.S. IRF Ambassador Sam Brownback decried Russia's Persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses on Twitter:

"Very concerned that authorities in #Russia are physically abusing Jehovah's Witnesses, who have been subject to imprisonment, raids and other abuses simply for exercising their beliefs. We call on Russia to respect its international obligations and commitments to #humanrights." (link to source: <https://bit.ly/38MjqJJ>).

Jarrold Lopes, a spokesman for Jehovah's Witnesses, states: "We are pleased to know that the world is closely watching, and influential people along with human rights bodies have been rebuking Russia for persecuting Jehovah's Witnesses. We hope that, before any more Witnesses are beaten or tortured, Russian leadership will punish local authorities for misusing the nation's anti-extremism law as an excuse to persecute peaceful Jehovah's Witnesses, and thus clear their country from reproach."

Prosecutions against religious organizations and believers

Sova Center (14.02.2020) - <https://bit.ly/38ccOKI> - Three Jehovah's Witnesses were sentenced in January.

The Nadezhdinsky District Court of Primorsky Krai found Grigory Bubnov (born in 1965) guilty of organizing the activities of an extremist organization (Article 282.2 Part 1 of the Criminal Code) and issued a suspended sentence of five years (or six, according to other sources) with a five-year ban on participating in public organizations and restriction of freedom for a year.

The Polar District Court of the Murmansk Region sentenced Viktor Trofimov and Roman Markin under the same article to a fine of 350 and 300 thousand rubles, respectively.

In Karpinsk of the Sverdlovsk Region, Alexander Pryanikov, Venera Dulova and Darya Dulova were sentenced to two and a half, two and one year of imprisonment respectively under Article 282.2 Part 2 of the Criminal Code (participation in the activities of an extremist organization).

Meanwhile, the Promyshlenny District Court of Orenburg returned to the prosecutor the case of six Jehovah's Witnesses (Sergey Logunov, Vladimir Kochnev, Nikolai Zhugin, Alexei Matveev and Pavel Lekontsev). Charges against them were brought under different parts of Articles 282.2 and 282.3 of the Criminal Code. According to the court, the prosecution failed to indicate the motives and objectives of their crimes, and the actions imputed to Logunov were not described in sufficient detail.

In Kamchatka Krai, however, a similar lower court decision was overturned by the regional court. The case of Konstantin and Snezhana Bazhenov, as well as of Vera Zolotova was returned to the Yelizovsky District Court for consideration on the merits.

Eight new cases opened against Jehovah's Witnesses were reported in January.

In early January, we learned about a case initiated under Article 282.2 of the Criminal Code in Nevinnomyssk of Stavropol Krai; Sergey Kuznetsov, Rimma Vaschenko, Anatoly Boyko, Georgy and Tatyana Parfentiev, Evgeniya Akhrameeva, Nadezhda Konkova, Karina Saakian and another person, whose name we do not know, became the suspects in this case.

A little later, a similar criminal case against three people was opened in Georgievsk of the same region. Defendant Viktor Zimovsky, has been arrested.

In Achinsk of Krasnoyarsk Krai, a case under Article 282.2 Part 1 of the Criminal Code was opened against Viktor Sagin. In Murmansk, a case under the same article was brought against Vitaly Omelchenko; he was put under a ban on certain activities.

Another case was initiated under Article 282.2 of the Criminal Code in Kazan. Lyaysan Bochkareva and Tatyana Obizhestvit were placed under house arrest, and Andrei Bochkarev was put in pre-trial detention.

In Kemerovo, Sergei Yavushkin and Alexander Bondarchuk, previously charged with participating in the activities of an extremist organization (Article 282.2 part 2 of the Criminal Code), now face additional charges under Article 282.3 Part 1 of the Criminal Code.

Two new suspects under Article 282.2 of the Criminal Code – Alexander Vospitaniuk and Andrei Ryshkov – were charged in Kursk; the latter was arrested.

A criminal case under Article 282.2 of the Criminal Code against Gennady Polyakevich and Gennady Skutelets was opened in late January in Pechora of the Komi Republic. The former was placed in pre-trial detention, the latter – under house arrest.

Dmitry Vinogradov, a Jehovah's Witness from Chelyabinsk, was charged under Article 282.2 Part 2 of the Criminal Code.

In mid-January, the Central District Military Court sentenced Arthur Valov and Niyaz Ziyattinov to 12 years in a maximum-security penal colony under Article 205.1 part 1.1 of the Criminal Code (financing of terrorism) and Article 205.5 Part 2 of the Criminal Code (participation in the activities of a terrorist organization). According to the investigation (whose opinion was upheld by the court), Valov and Ziyattinov, arrested in April 2018, had participated in the activities of the radical Islamic party Hizb ut-Tahrir, which has been recognized as terrorist in Russia. They studied religious literature, recruited new supporters and held joint meetings. In addition, they made monetary contributions to support printing of literature and conducting meetings, as well as donated money to help those arrested on similar charges. We believe that prosecutions against Hizb ut-Tahrir members under anti-terrorist articles based solely on their party activities (holding meetings, reading literature etc.) are inappropriate.

We also learned in early January, that Abdulhamid Shakirzianov, the Imam of the Cathedral Mosque, was fined two thousand rubles under Article 20.29 of the Code of Administrative Offenses (mass distribution of extremist materials) in court in December. The administrative prosecution against Shakirzianov was based on the results of an audit by the Novosibirsk Prosecutor's Office, which found in the mosque's bookstore the following texts included on the Federal List of Extremist Materials: *Women in Islam VS Women in the Judeo-Christian Tradition* (Entry No. 3346 of the List), *The Gardens of the Righteous* by Muhyiddin an-Nawawi (Entry No 4645) and *Piety and Fear of God* (Entry No. 4153). In our opinion, all three books were banned inappropriately. As we wrote earlier, Yelchin Gadzhiev, the owner of the Novosibirsk mosque bookstore, was also fined in December for distributing two of these books.

Special Bimonthly FORB Digest (01-15.02.2020)

News about Jehovah's Witnesses and other religious issues

As of February 15, 2020, there were

307 Jehovah's Witnesses under investigation and facing criminal charges

38 in prison (29 pretrial; 9 sentenced)

27 under house arrest

28 convicted (18 in 2019; 10 already in 2020, more than half of total in 2019)

15.02.2020 - Five believers were beaten in the Orenburg Colony. Feliks Makhammadiev has a broken rib, a damaged lung and kidney

Link to the full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2020/02/37.html>

On February 6, 2020, in Orenburg, officers of Penal Colony No. 1 beat believers Budenchuk, German, Gridasov, Makhammadiyev, and Miretskiy with clubs and legs. As a result, one of them, Feliks Makhammadiyev, was hospitalized. The rest were falsely charged and sent to a punishment cell.

[Continue reading...](#)

14.02.2020 - In Chita, Vadim Kutsenko reports that during interrogation he was beaten using electric shock to his stomach and leg

Link to the full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2020/02/46.html>

Late in the evening of February 10, 2020, Vadim Kutsenko, 31, was tortured in the forest, leaving him in pain and weakness. Law enforcement officers repeatedly beat and choked him and applied electric shocks to his stomach and leg.

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12.02.2020 - Politicians support putting God into the constitution

The speaker of the Legislative Assembly of St. Petersburg, Viacheslav Makarov, supported the inclusion of mention of God in the constitution of the RF.

[Continue reading...](#)

11.02.2020 - Pentecostal churches facing possible closure, destruction

Kaluga's Word of Life Church and Oryol's Resurrection Church of God are battling, in court, official attempts to destroy their places of worship. "The City Administration received an order from the FSB to shut us down by any means," Oryol Pastor Pavel Abashin insists.

[Continue reading...](#)

11.02.2020 - Case of Gerasimov in Yalta

Link to the full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/cases/yalta.html>

On February 10, the prosecutor requested for Artem Gerasimov from Yalta six years and six months in prison and a year of restriction of freedom. His is accused of meeting with fellow believers.

[Continue reading...](#)

10.02.2020 - On February 10, a court in Bryansk decided to release Tatyana Shamsheva and Olga Silayeva from jail.

Link to the full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/cases/novozybkov2.html>

For their faith, both women had been imprisoned almost eight months.

[Continue reading...](#)

10.02.2020 - Transbaikalia becomes the 54th region of Russia where Jehovah's Witnesses are repressed. Searches in the City of Chita and six other settlements

Link to the full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2020/02/26.html>

Early on the morning of February 10, 2020, FSB officers simultaneously searched the Trans-Baikal Territory, including Chita, the towns of Shilka and Khilok, and the villages of Karymskoye, Kurort Darasun, and Pervomaisky.

[Continue reading...](#)

07.02.2020 - Citizens file complaints: Bailiffs seized passports from listeners and returned them with summons for FSB interrogation

Link to the full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2020/02/22.html>

On January 29, 2020, about 100 citizens came to the Soviet District Court of Lipetsk, where three believers were in prolonged pre-trial detention. Right there, the observers were handed a summons for questioning by an investigator in cases against believers. Citizens are outraged by the actions of these officials. The first complaints were filed on February 2.

[Continue reading...](#)

06.02.2020 - Timofey Zhukov detained by security officials attempting to force a psychiatric examination in a hospital

Link to the full Russian text: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2020/02/16.html>

On February 5, 2020, in Khanty-Mansiysk, believing lawyer Timofey Zhukov, 40, was detained under unknown circumstances. Surgut security forces want him relocated for a month to a psychiatric hospital more than a thousand kilometers from his house. Believers in Surgut previously reported torture.

[Continue reading...](#)

06.02.2020 - Rosfinmonitoring treats as terrorists more than 200 believers. How Jehovah's witnesses are deprived of livelihoods

Link to the full Russian text: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2020/02/15.html>

Federal Financial Monitoring Service of the Russian Federation (Rosfinmonitoring) has included more than 200 innocent believers in the list of individuals involved in extremism and terrorism. They lose their jobs, business, pensions, bank accounts and even the opportunity to buy a SIM card or get insurance.

[Continue reading...](#)

04.02.2020 - Church's suggestions to violate separation of church and state fester

The head of the State Duma's Committee on Legislation and State Structure, Pavel Krasheninnikov, does not support the suggestion to enshrine in the constitution of the RF the concept of marriage as the union of a man and a woman and the mention of God.

[Continue reading...](#)

03.02.2020 - Court hearings in the case of Konstantin Guzev. have begun

Link to the full Russian text: <https://jw-russia.org/cases/birobidzhan11.html>

Birobidzhan authorities deprived him of his livelihood, and now he faces a prison sentence for faith

[Continue reading...](#)

02.02.2020 - Moscow patriarch sparks media storm over amending constitution

Irina Kirkora, vice-chair of the Council on Human Rights [C.H.R.] under the president of the Russian Federation and member of a working group for drafting suggestions for introducing amendments to the constitution, thinks that mention of God in the preamble to the fundamental law of the country is incorrect.

[Continue reading...](#)

Pentecostal churches facing possible closure, destruction

Kaluga's Word of Life Church and Oryol's Resurrection Church of God are battling, in court, official attempts to destroy their places of worship. "The City Administration received an order from the FSB to shut us down by any means," Oryol Pastor Pavel Abashin insists. Bailiffs closed the building of Nizhny Novgorod's Jesus Embassy Church. A court rejected a suit to demolish Samara's Good News Church.

By Victoria Arnold

Forum 18 (11.02.2020) - <https://bit.ly/3buuQuJ> - Three Pentecostal congregations in different regions of Russia may be barred from using their church buildings because of alleged violations of construction, fire safety, or planning regulations. The churches insist that these problems have either been completely eliminated, or were a mistake by the authorities. A fourth won a reprieve in court in December 2019.

For periods ranging from 18 months to well over four years, the communities – in Nizhny Novgorod, Kaluga, Oryol and Samara – have been caught up in Russia's labyrinthine systems of rules regulating the acquisition, alteration, construction and use of buildings.

The communities have had to undergo often multiple court processes in order to assert their rights to property which they purchased entirely legally and have used safely for years. These proceedings, which can include the commissioning of expert analyses by technical specialists, take time and cost money. As a result of the court proceedings, congregations can lose access to their own places of worship for an indefinite period.

Bailiffs closed the building of Jesus Embassy Church in Nizhny Novgorod on 31 December 2019 due to alleged "fire safety" violations, but the changing number of violations claimed, and the apparent hostility of the FSB security service, raise doubts that officials will allow the Church to reopen its building soon.

For more than a decade, the authorities in Kaluga have tried to confiscate the church building and land from Word of Life Pentecostal Church's Cathedral of Christ the Saviour. Numerous court cases have ensued over whether the Church owns its land, whether it owns its building, whether reconstruction of the building is safe, and whether it should be demolished. "An undisguised leitmotif in the Prosecutor's statements is that if it is impossible to bring [the building] into line with the 2000 technical certificate, then only one solution is possible – to demolish the Church completely," Word of Life complains (see below).

Following an inspection of Oryol's Resurrection Church of God, in which the FSB security service took part, Prosecutors successfully brought a case to court to have the church building closed because the community had not obtained official permission to bring it into commission. The authorities then claimed that the church building encroaches on the neighbouring, municipally-owned plot, which the Church disputes. "The City Administration received an order from the FSB to shut us down by any means," Pastor Pavel Abashin insists (see below).

In Samara, by contrast, an arbitration court ruled in favour of Good News Pentecostal Church in December 2019, rejecting a request from the city's Town Planning Department to have the Church demolished at its own expense. The Department could still challenge the decision in court. Officials have repeatedly rebuffed attempts to legalise ownership of the land where the Church has worshipped for two decades (see below).

Complex, sometimes contradictory, and often inconsistently applied legislation can lead religious communities to lose their places of worship. Officials in July 2019 barred a Baptist community in Novorossiysk from using its church "for religious purposes", despite the fact that it has worshipped on the same site for two decades. Local authorities are often unwilling to permit the construction of purpose-built churches and mosques.

Alleged "fire safety" violations and other alleged violations such as of sanitation regulations have also been used to target Protestant theological education institutions, as well as churches and mosques. In one such case, the Pentecostal Chuvash Bible Centre in 2007 lost its legal personality status but after a long and expensive legal struggle won a European Court of Human Rights case in Strasbourg (Application No. 33203/08) on 12 June 2014.

Kaluga: "Find ways of confiscating that land – any"

The authorities in Kaluga south-west of Moscow have long tried to confiscate the church building and land from Word of Life Pentecostal Church's Cathedral of Christ the Saviour.

In November 2006, the Mayor ordered Word of Life to give up its church building and land, in connection with the adjacent construction of Centrum Park Shopping Complex, but offered no compensation. When the Pentecostals bought the 1,000 square metres

[10,800 square feet] unfinished sports complex in 2002, the local authorities had no complaints, Pastor Albert Ratkin told Forum 18 in February 2007. Yet soon after foundations for the shopping centre were laid in early 2006, pressure began in the form of constant fire safety, tax, and other inspections.

At the time, Moscow's Slavic Centre for Law and Justice pointed out that confiscation of private land in this way is possible under the Land Code only for exceptional state or municipal needs, "and the construction of a shopping and entertainment complex is not among them".

Kaluga Regional Arbitration Court found the Mayor's Decree to be unlawful on 6 June 2007, but on 4 July 2007, police seized documents and a computer during a raid on the church. The City Prosecutor's Office then began questioning church members about the Church's school, and opened criminal investigations into the school four or five times between the raid and October 2007.

At a public hearing in the Architecture and Town Planning Department on 15 October 2008, which discussed a possible change of use for Word of Life's land, a local representative of the Swedish firm behind the shopping centre development spoke. He claimed that sales of alcohol from the shopping centre might result in drunken violence against church members if Word of Life remained on its land.

Apparently unaware that he was giving a public address, on 9 February 2009 at a local government meeting, Kaluga Region's then Governor Anatoly Artamonov ordered that Word of Life's land be seized by "any" means. "Find ways of confiscating that land – any" he said in a meeting that can be seen online with English subtitles.

Kaluga: Application to have ownership recognised refused

Word of Life Church in Kaluga applied in June 2015 to have its ownership recognised, church representative Yulia Ignatova told Forum 18 on 22 January 2020.

In May 2016, Word of Life applied to the city's Architecture and Town Planning Department for official permission to begin using the buildings and bring them into commission. This was refused as the buildings were said to be to be "unauthorised structures" over which Word of Life allegedly had no rights.

Retroactive legalisation of "unauthorised structures" is not uncommon. It can happen if the applicant owns the land plot (as Word of Life has since 2002) and the structure conforms to town planning and construction regulations. Lack of a reconstruction permit is not in itself grounds for denying recognition of the right of ownership, according to a Supreme Court ruling in 2014.

In 2018, Kaluga City Administration refused the Kaluga Diocese of the Russian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) permission to bring a chapel into use as it was claimed to be an "unauthorised structure" because a building permit had not been obtained.

On 21 August 2018, however, Kaluga District Court ruled in favour of the Diocese, stating: "A claim for recognition of ownership of an unauthorised structure shall be satisfied when the court establishes that the only signs of unauthorised construction are the lack of a building permit and/or the absence of a act putting the facility into operation, which the person who created the unauthorised construction took measures to obtain."

Despite this, Kaluga Regional Arbitration Court ruled against Word of Life on 29 March 2019, arguing that the Church had not obtained proper permissions for the

reconstruction and that the building had serious defects. Word of Life failed in its appeals against this at the 12th Arbitration Appeal Court on 24 September 2019, and at Central District Arbitration Appeal Court on 23 December 2019.

Kaluga: Prosecutor's case started in 2015, continued to 2019

Kaluga City Prosecutor's Office lodged a case with Kaluga District Court against Word of Life in December 2015, after the latest Kaluga Regional Arbitration Court case was lodged. This was suspended three times while Arbitration Court proceedings were ongoing, and reopened for the final time on 25 October 2019.

"In the [original, 2015] lawsuit, the Prosecutor's Office refers to an allegedly conducted inspection [of the building]," Ignatova of Word of Life told Forum 18. "However, verbally in Kaluga District Court, the Prosecutor said that there had been no inspection, but that a representative of the Kaluga City Administration had simply gone to the leadership of the Prosecutor's Office and handed over the documents that we had sent them. Our request to submit inspection materials was ignored."

The Prosecutor's Office argued that that Word of Life's building should be brought back into line with its technical certificate dating from February 2000 (before Word of Life reconstructed it). Prosecutors also argued that Word of Life should stop using its building in the meantime.

Word of Life argued that the 2000 technical certificate was invalid and had been superseded by a 2016 certificate, which testified to the reconstruction work done since the property was purchased in 2000 (such documents describe the dimensions, materials, and physical features of a building, including any changes and repairs).

"An undisguised leitmotif in the Prosecutor's statements is that if it is impossible to bring [the building] into line with the 2000 technical certificate, then only one solution is possible – to demolish the Church completely," Word of Life said on 6 December 2019.

Word of Life also argued that it should be allowed to continue using its building on the basis of amendments to the Civil Code from 30 March 2016 and 4 August 2018. These give religious organisations the right to use such "unauthorised structures" indefinitely if they conform to legal requirements, and up to 2030 if they do not.

Despite this, on 4 December 2019, Kaluga District Court dismissed Word of Life's arguments as an allegedly "incorrect interpretation of the law".

Prosecutors claimed that the construction company KalugaTIZISProekt, engaged by the city administration to inspect Word of Life's building in August 2018, had found four defects in the building, including: one problem with the load-bearing capacity of a structural element; and a lack of fire retardant coatings in the boiler room and elsewhere.

Word of Life insists that these problems have been resolved, and presented five expert reports to show that the building is safe. These were "ignored" by the court, Ignatova of Word of Life told Forum 18.

Kaluga: Inspections confirm "no defects, damage or deformities"

Two of these five expert reports, both seen by Forum 18, were produced by state institutions, Forum 18 notes. Moscow's Russian Federal Centre for Judicial Analysis at the Justice Ministry carried out its analysis between March and September 2017 by order of

Kaluga Regional Arbitration Court. The Federal Centre is the "highest-level expert institution", Ignatova of Word of Life pointed out.

Word of Life itself commissioned the Justice Ministry's Kursk Judicial Analysis Laboratory in September-October 2018.

Both state inspections, which included site visits and examination of technical and legal documents, concluded that the building conformed to all construction, town-planning, and other rules and norms, and did not pose a threat to the life and health of citizens.

Forum 18 wrote on 29 January 2020 to Kaluga City Administration and its Department for Architecture and Town Planning, asking why they thought Word of Life Church ought to be closed if state experts had found it to be safe. The administration sent a form response the same day saying that Forum 18's request would be dealt with within 30 calendar days. Forum 18 received no answer to these questions by the end of the working day in Kaluga on 11 February.

Word of Life also commissioned a private expert, construction engineer Nikolay Pashinin, to ascertain whether it was possible to return the building to its 2000 condition, whether this would incur significant costs, and whether significant costs would arise from eliminating the problems identified by the KalugaTIZISProekt inspection.

Pashinin found that since Word of Life's building was "in working condition and suitable for use for its intended purpose", bringing it back into line with the 2000 technical certificate would be possible only at significant expense. He also concluded that all the problems found by KalugaTIZISProekt had been resolved, that the work on each had been documented, and that there were "no defects, damage or deformities" to the building.

Kaluga: District Court rules against Word of Life

Despite these expert reports, Kaluga District Court decided on 4 December 2019 that no proof existed that all violations identified by KalugaTIZISProekt had been eliminated. The Court also claimed that Word of Life's arguments "came down to only disagreement with this expert opinion – which the Arbitration Court has already accepted as 'relevant, valid, and reliable evidence'".

The District Court ruled – as Prosecutors had argued - that Word of Life's building should be brought back into line with the February 2000 technical certificate, and that Word of Life should stop using it in the meantime.

Word of Life lodged an appeal at Kaluga Regional Court on 14 January 2020, and the first hearing has been scheduled for 2 March. At present the Church continues to be able to use its building.

"The question remains - who benefits from destroying the temple, and why are believers being deprived of a place where they can practise their faith on the basis of the Constitution of the Russian Federation?" Word of Life commented.

Samara: Reprieve?

The Civil Code amendments of 30 March 2016 and 4 August 2018 – which give religious organisations the right to use "unauthorised structures" indefinitely if they conform to legal requirements, and up to 2030 if they do not – have resulted in a favourable court decision for Good News Pentecostal Church in Samara, a city in south-eastern European Russia on the Volga river.

Officials repeatedly rebuffed attempts to legalise ownership of the land where Good News Church has worshipped for two decades. Officials want to demolish the church, at the congregation's expense.

On 5 December 2019, however, Samara Regional Arbitration Court refused a request from the city's Town Planning Department to have the Church demolished at its own expense. The Court found that the Church was an "unauthorised structure", but ruled out demolition because provision for it in the Land Code does not apply to structures of religious significance.

The court decided the Church is a structure of religious significance using the 2010 Law on Restitution of Religious Property, which the Town Planning Department did not dispute. In such cases, the Judge pointed out, religious communities may continue to use "unauthorised structures" indefinitely if they conform to legal requirements, and up to 2030 if they do not.

The Town Planning Department lodged an appeal against the decision on 13 January 2020. The 11th Arbitration Appeal Court rejected this on 23 January for technical reasons, but the Department now has until 21 February to resubmit its challenge.

Oryol: Church still threatened with demolition

In Oryol, a city south-west of Moscow, the Resurrection Church of God received its land in good faith in 2009 from the Oryol Regional Department of Property, Industrial, and Information Policy. In December 2017, the Church was, according to court documents seen by Forum 18, inspected by the FSB security service, construction inspectors, and fire inspectors from the Emergencies Ministry. The Construction Inspectorate later decided not to take the church to court.

Prosecutors nevertheless lodged a suit at Oryol's Railway District Court to have the church building closed because the community had not obtained official permission to bring it into commission, and had therefore not "passed, in the prescribed manner, a check by state bodies for compliance with technical regulations, construction and sanitary norms and rules, or fire safety requirements".

Railway District Court ruled on 28 May 2018 that the Church's use of the building was unlawful and should be stopped until it had obtained official permission to bring it into use.

The administration had earlier refused this permission because of a dispute over the land plot's boundaries (see below), Pastor Pavel Abashin told afmedia.ru on 14 December 2018. The Church appealed unsuccessfully on 25 July 2018, and its cassational appeal was rejected without consideration on 8 November 2018.

As of 11 February 2020, worship continues in the building. It appears that Arbitration Court proceedings on recognising the ownership of the building and clarifying the plot's boundaries, which have continued since 2018, have delayed the implementation of the District Court decision.

Oryol: Church's struggle to have its ownership recognized

"The City Administration received an order from the FSB to shut us down by any means," Pastor Pavel Abashin wrote on his VKontakte page on 3 December 2019. "They were looking for something to complain about, [and] since the building was new and all requirements of the fire service [and] the Ministry of Emergencies had been met, it was

necessary to find some reason why it would stick, and of course they found one - or rather artificially created it."

Alexander Verkhovsky of Moscow's SOVA Center for Information and Analysis commented to Forum 18 on 15 January 2020 that the initiator of such proceedings may not be the FSB security service. "It could be any official who wants to create difficulties for one organisation or another. And in the main, whether it is possible to 'eliminate violations' .. depends precisely on how much they want this."

Pastor Abashin complained that "they came without coordinating it with us, carried out a survey of the municipal land adjacent to our site, and made it so that we allegedly encroached on the municipal land .. and filed a lawsuit against us to have our boiler house demolished. Because of this, the commissioning of the building was rejected and we were closed by the court."

Oryol City Administration claims that parts of the Church's building (of 7.88 and 0.5 square metres respectively) cross one plot's south-eastern boundary, and therefore "unlawfully occupy" municipal land. The Church argues that the land boundaries were incorrectly recorded in the cadastral register, and had a new plan drawn up by a cadastral engineer in March 2019.

In May 2018, the Church lodged a case with Oryol Regional Arbitration Court to have its right of ownership of the building recognised. The City Administration launched a counterclaim to force the church to "vacate the unlawfully occupied land plot", which was attached to the ownership case in July 2018 to be considered simultaneously.

On 16 December 2019, the administration stated that it wanted the Church to demolish those parts of its building which allegedly encroach on municipal land.

On 14 January 2020, Oryol Regional Arbitration Court agreed to the Church's request to suspend proceedings in its case to have its right of ownership recognised. This now awaits the final outcome of the land boundary case.

On 17 February, hearings will begin of the Resurrection Church's suit against the city administration (lodged on 20 December 2019) to determine the correct boundaries of the plots of land on which its building stands. This is the church's second attempt to correct the alleged boundary error through the arbitration courts – its previous suit proved unsuccessful on 28 February 2019, with unsuccessful appeals on 25 June and 15 November 2019.

"The area of our land plot has not changed by one centimetre," Pastor Abashin insisted. "We made several independent examinations, they all prove that the city has encroached on our land, but the courts basically do not want to take into account the conclusions of independent experts."

On 30 January 2020, Forum 18 wrote to Oryol City Administration and its Department for Town Planning, Architecture, and Land Management, asking why they did not agree that a simple cadastral error had been made, and why it wanted the church to vacate the allegedly "unlawfully occupied" land.

On 3 February, the Town Planning Department replied to Forum 18, claiming that the questions "do not fall within the competence of the department".

Responding on 6 February, Igor Kralichev, deputy head of the city administration, pointed out that Oryol Regional Arbitration Court had found no cadastral error in the church's first attempt to have this clarified. He added that "violation of the boundaries of

the land plot belonging to the church, and unlawful occupation of part of a municipal land plot, served as grounds for an application to court to request the demolition of part of the church building".

Will church's alleged fire safety violations be resolved?

Bailiffs have closed the building of Jesus Embassy Church in Nizhny Novgorod due to alleged "fire safety" violations, but the changing number of violations claimed, and the apparent hostility of the FSB security service, raise doubts that the church building will be reopened soon. "Of course the FSB isn't interested in fire safety," Alexander Verkhovsky of SOVA Center commented.

By Victoria Arnold

Forum 18 (06.02.2020) - <https://bit.ly/321vDix> - Bailiffs sealed the building of Jesus Embassy Pentecostal Church in Nizhny Novgorod on 31 December 2019 and its congregation now has to rent places of worship elsewhere in the city. The authorities have since summer 2018 claimed that multiple fire safety "violations" exist in the building. The church strongly disputes that these violations – if they exist – should have resulted in the closure of the building.

The alleged fire safety violations followed inspections initiated by the FSB security service. The FSB was also behind seven prosecutions of the church and its members between summer 2017 and summer 2018 for alleged "illegal missionary activity". One of the prosecutions led to the deportation of a Zimbabwean medical student, and is now the subject of a European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) case in Strasbourg (see below).

"Of course the FSB isn't interested in fire safety," Alexander Verkhovsky of Moscow's SOVA Center for Information and Analysis commented to Forum 18 on 15 January 2020. "Fire supervision is just an 'ideal controller': it will always find something, and something that is difficult or impossible to fix at that. Therefore, it is used. Rather, one should be surprised that it is not used so often" (see below).

Alleged fire safety violations and other alleged violations - such as of sanitation regulations - have also been used to target Protestant theological education institutions, churches, and Muslim mosques (see below).

The only way to have access to Jesus Embassy's building restored is to apply through the courts, showing that the church has followed all the fire inspectorate's orders. "We are not completely confident that this will happen in the near future, as the authorities are scheduling new inspections," Pastor Pavel Ryndich told Forum 18 on 19 January 2020.

"These authorities, instead of protecting their citizens, do not give them the right to attend the church that they themselves have chosen," Pastor Ryndich complained. "But the Constitution of the Russian Federation promises every citizen the right to freely practise the religion that they choose!" (see below).

Pentecostal churches facing possible closure

Jesus Embassy Church in Nizhny Novgorod is one of at least three Pentecostal congregations in different regions of Russia which may be barred from using their church buildings because of alleged violations of construction, fire safety, or planning regulations. The churches insist that these problems have either been completely eliminated, or were a mistake by the authorities.

For periods ranging from 18 months to well over four years, the communities – in Nizhny Novgorod, Kaluga, and Oryol – have been caught up in Russia's labyrinthine systems of rules regulating the acquisition, alteration, construction, and use of buildings.

The communities have had to undergo often multiple court processes in order to assert their rights to property which they purchased entirely legally and have used safely for years. These proceedings, which can include the commissioning of expert analysis by technical specialists, take time and cost money. As a result of the court proceedings, congregations may lose access to their own places of worship for an indefinite length of time.

As of 6 February 2020, Jesus Embassy Church in Nizhny Novgorod remains sealed. The buildings of the Resurrection Church of God in Oryol and the Word of Life Church's Cathedral of Christ the Saviour in Kaluga remain open, however, while court proceedings continue (see forthcoming F18News article).

Complex, sometimes contradictory, and often inconsistently applied legislation can lead religious communities to lose their places of worship. In July 2019, officials barred a Baptist community in Novorossiysk from using its church "for religious purposes", despite the fact that it has worshipped on the same site for two decades. Local authorities are often unwilling to permit the construction of purpose-built churches and mosques.

Officials have repeatedly rebuffed attempts to legalise ownership of the land where Good News Pentecostal Church in Samara has worshipped for two decades. Officials want to demolish the church, at the congregation's expense, but in December 2019, Samara Regional Arbitration Court refused such a request from the city's town planning department (see forthcoming F18News article).

In May 2019, officials bulldozed a mosque built on farmland near Chernyakhovsk in Russia's Kaliningrad exclave, noting that it violated planning regulations.

FSB-initiated prosecutions

Between summer 2017 and summer 2018, the Jesus Embassy church in Nizhny Novgorod and its centralised regional organisation were fined four times under Administrative Code Article 5.26, Part 3 ("Implementation of activities by a religious organisation without indicating its official full name, including the issuing or distribution, within the framework of missionary activity, of literature and printed, audio, and video material without a label bearing this name, or with an incomplete or deliberately false label"). They were also fined three times under Administrative Code Article 5.26, Part 4 ("Russians conducting missionary activity") for posting two videos on social media.

Two African students who appeared in one of the videos were also prosecuted and ordered to leave the country. Jesus Embassy has appealed to the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) in Strasbourg against the fine of 100,000 Roubles (three months' average wages), imposed on one of the students, Zimbabwean medical student Kudzai Nyamarebvu, for carrying out alleged "missionary activity" while on a student visa.

The ECtHR accepted the appeal (Application No. 16649/19) on 26 May 2019 under Article 9 ("Freedom of thought, conscience and religion") and Article 11 ("Freedom of assembly and association") of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.

The prosecutions in Nizhny Novgorod Region appear to be driven by the FSB security service. "The FSB is interested in Jesus Embassy itself and Protestants in general," the Church's lawyer Aleksey Vetoshkin told Forum 18 from Nizhny Novgorod in May 2018.

These prosecutions followed amendments to the Administrative Code and Religion Law introduced in July 2016 as part of the "Yarovaya" package of "anti-terrorism" laws. Authorities across Russia almost immediately began to use these amendments against people and communities exercising their freedom of religion and belief.

"Of course the FSB isn't interested in fire safety"

On 16 August 2018, prosecutors in Nizhny Novgorod lodged a lawsuit against Jesus Embassy seeking to prohibit use of the church's building because of alleged fire safety violations. "The documents we have openly say that the FSB initiated [the first safety inspections]," Pastor Pavel Ryndich told Forum 18 on 16 December 2019.

Jesus Embassy brought a case on 6 November 2018 challenging the Emergencies Ministry's fire inspection decisions. The Church's legal challenge was rejected on 28 December 2018 by Nizhny Novgorod's Moscow District Court, and on 3 April 2019 by Nizhny Novgorod Regional Court.

This legal challenge delayed a decision on the Prosecutors' suit to prohibit the Church's use of its building. "Since 2018, there have been numerous inspections of the church building, which was acquired in 2007," the church's pastor and regional bishop Pavel Ryndich wrote on Facebook on 26 November 2019.

"As a result, violations of fire safety standards were discovered. The building, which dates from 1949, fulfils the requirements of modern fire regulations. [It] has historical value, which is why the church has tried in every possible way to preserve the appearance of the building in its original form, and has paid twice as much to eliminate all violations."

On 30 May 2019, Nizhny Novgorod's Moscow District Court upheld the Prosecutors' request that Jesus Embassy's building should not be used until the alleged fire safety problems had been dealt with. On 26 November Nizhny Novgorod Regional Court upheld the Moscow District Court ruling.

Jesus Embassy resolved "almost all 78" original violations and closed off the third floor of the building, Pastor Ryndich wrote in November 2019. But the fire inspectorate "continued to make endless demands", eventually raising the number of alleged shortcomings to 120.

"Of course the FSB isn't interested in fire safety," Alexander Verkhovsky of Moscow's SOVA Center for Information and Analysis commented to Forum 18 on 15 January 2020. "Fire supervision is just an 'ideal controller': it will always find something, and something that is difficult or impossible to fix at that. Therefore, it is used. Rather, one should be surprised that it is not used so often."

Alleged fire safety violations and other alleged violations such as of sanitation regulations have also been used to target Protestant theological education institutions, as well as churches and mosques. In one such case, the Pentecostal Chuvash Bible Centre lost its legal personality status in 2007, but after a long and expensive legal struggle won a European Court of Human Rights case in Strasbourg (Application No. 33203/08) on 12 June 2014.

Forum 18 asked Nizhny Novgorod Regional Prosecutor's Office and the Regional Emergencies Ministry on 23 January 2020 what the church must do to have its building reopened, why the building was still considered unsafe when almost all violations had been dealt with, and what will happen if the remaining alleged violations cannot be eliminated.

Forum 18 received no reply from the Regional Prosecutors' Office by the end of the working day in Nizhny Novgorod on 6 February.

The Emergencies Ministry replied on 3 February, stating that to get the building unsealed the church must "comply with Moscow District Court's decision, specifically to eliminate fully the violations of fire safety requirements set forth in the [prosecutor's] civil lawsuit".

The Ministry added that the two remaining violations concerned a lack of adequate escape routes and a lack of an internal water supply for firefighting, which "directly affect the safety of people in the building". It added that if these are not resolved, the "judicial authorities will not decide accordingly to permit the operation of the building".

Is it possible to "eliminate violations"?

Alexander Verkhovsky of the SOVA Center noted that the initiator of such proceedings may not be the FSB: "It could be any official who wants to create difficulties for one organisation or another. And in the main, whether it is possible to 'eliminate violations' – that is, to reach an agreement with the fire inspectorate – depends precisely on how much they want this."

"Protestants have such stories more often, most likely because their buildings are relatively numerous. Of course, there are even more churches of the Russian Orthodox Church, but they have an informal defence against checks, like mosques in Muslim regions (and not even only there)."

Verkhovsky pointed out that fire inspections can be a problem not only for religious organisations, but also for human rights groups, against whom they have been used "as a means of politically motivated pressure - more than once".

New Year closure of Jesus Embassy building

Bailiffs sealed the building of the Jesus Embassy Bible Centre in Nizhny Novgorod on 31 December 2019.

The church insists that its building is safe and that it has dealt with all the issues raised by fire inspectors. Prosecutors argued in court, however, that two violations remained unresolved – an alleged lack of adequate escape routes, and an alleged lack of an internal water supply for firefighting. The Church describes these claims as "debatable and minor", lawyer Aleksey Vetoshkin told Forum 18 on 30 January 2020.

"We are working on getting the church opened," Vetoshkin added.

"We're convinced 100 per cent that our church is safe for visitors," Pastor Ryndich told Forum 18 on 16 December 2019. "It is not about safety. We understand there are forces against the church."

"We are not discouraged, because the Lord is more than a building. It is written that God 'dwells in miraculous temples', and in our hearts," Pastor Ryndich wrote on his VKontakte social network page on 3 January 2020.

While their church is closed, the Jesus Embassy congregation is worshipping at the Seventh-day Adventists' cultural centre and other locations in Nizhny Novgorod, Ryndich told Forum 18 on 19 January. The building remains the property of the church and there is no prohibition on the community meeting elsewhere.

"We continue to function as a church in complicated circumstances"

"We continue to function as a church in complicated circumstances," Pastor Ryndich told Forum 18. "We have to follow the injunctions and this means major financial costs, and at the same time we must rent other premises to hold services."

Shortly after Jesus Embassy's appeal was rejected in November 2019, Pastor Ryndich asked on Facebook "Why is there such pressure on the Protestant church in Nizhny Novgorod?" He noted that "these authorities, instead of protecting their citizens, do not give them the right to attend the church that they themselves have chosen. But the Constitution of the Russian Federation promises every citizen the right to freely practise the religion that they choose!"

Special Bimonthly FORB Digest (16-31.02.2020)

Jehovah's Witnesses

Russia's ongoing crackdown against JWs, as of Monday, January 27, 2020:

301 under criminal investigation

24 men and women convicted for peaceful worship (9 sentenced to prison; 15 fined or probation)

27 men and women in pretrial detention

26 under house arrest

29.01.2020 - During mass searches in the town of Pechora, 14 Witnesses were detained, including women and the elderly. Four were not released even after a day

Link to the full text in Russian: <https://www.jw-russia.org/news/2020/01/48.html>

On January 28, 2020, at least ten addresses of believers were searched in Pechora (Komi). Of 14 people detained, four remain in custody: 68-year-old Pavel Ogorodov, who suffered a stroke; 60-year-old Gennady Polyakevich, Sergey Skutelets, 43, and Maksim Terentyev, 28.

[Continue reading](#)

28.01.2020 - The Komi Republic has become the 53rd region of Russia where Jehovah's Witnesses are persecuted. A series of searches took place in the town of Pechora

Link to the full text in Russian: <https://www.jw-russia.org/news/2020/01/41.html>

In the early morning hours of January 28, 2020, in the town of Pechora (Komi), law enforcement groups, in some cases of seven people, searched and detained local

residents who were suspected of practicing the religion of Jehovah's Witnesses. Details of what is happening are being clarified.

[Continue reading](#)

28.01.2020 - The Court in Sochi left 68-Year-Old Nikolay Kuzichkin in jail. about 70 People came to support the believer

Link to the full text in Russian: <https://www.jw-russia.org/news/2020/01/43.html>

On January 22, 2020, a court in Sochi left 68-year-old Nikolay Kuzichkin in custody until February 24, continuing to hold him in a pre-trial detention center where he is being denied needed medical treatment although his condition is critical.

[Continue reading](#)

28.01.2020 - In Karpinsk, the faith of a man and two women leads to criminal convictions

Full text in Russian: <https://www.jw-russia.org/news/2020/01/39.html>

On January 27, 2020, a judge of the Karpinsky City Court of the Sverdlovsk Region, Svetlana Gabbasova, decided in the case of three peaceful civilians under Part 2 of Article 282.2 of the Criminal Code (participation in extremism). All received suspended sentences lasting from one to two and a half years plus restrictions solely on the basis of their religious views.

[Continue reading](#)

27.01.2020- Jehovah's Witness from Surgut sent to Yekaterinburg to undergo unprecedented 30-day psychiatric examination

Link to the full text in Russian: <https://www.jw-russia.org/news/2020/01/38.html>

On January 16, 2020, a judge of the Surgut city court, Tatyana Slyusareva, ruled that a resident of Surgut, Timofey Zhukov, must go to Yekaterinburg for a psychiatric examination lasting an unprecedented period of up to 30 days (comparable to detention). In his complaint against the court ruling, Zhukov underscores that his religious beliefs are given as the basis for the stationary forensic psychiatric examination, which is a form of discrimination and political repression.

[Continue reading...](#)

23.01.2020 - Kursk Court jailed one believer. Arrests there for faith reach four

Link to the full text in Russian: <https://www.jw-russia.org/news/2020/01/28.html>

January 23, 2020, the court took into custody until March 11, 2020, a resident of Kursk, Andrey Ryshkov. The decision on another detainee, Aleksandr Vospitanyuk, is pending.

[Continue reading](#)

23.01.2020 - Faith as a felony: new details of the criminal case against a peaceful civilian in Zelenogorsk

Link to the full text in Russian: <https://www.jw-russia.org/news/2020/01/24.html>

On December 26, 2019, as a result of a series of searches in Zelenogorsk (Krasnoyarsk Territory), local resident Aleksandr Kabanov was detained and later released. A criminal case was launched against the believer under Part 1 of Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code. In particular, Kabanov is suspected of "holding weekly religious gatherings, spreading religious ... attitudes of the organization, and involving new adherents."

[Continue reading](#)

22.01.2020 - In Kursk, two more witnesses were detained. Earlier, a woman and two men had already been sent to the Kursk Pre-Trial detention center

Link to the full text in Russian: <https://www.jw-russia.org/news/2020/01/23.html>

On January 21, 2020, in Kursk, Aleksandr Vospitanyuk, 40, and Andrey Ryshkov, 32, were detained. The measure of restraint will be chosen in court on January 23. From mid-October, Artem and Alevtina Bagratyan as well as their friend, Andrey Andreyev, have been languishing behind bars.

[Continue reading](#)

22.01.2020 - "Search for everything related to Jehovah." New details of the raid on believers in Kazan

Link to the full text in Russian: <https://www.jw-russia.org/news/2020/01/22.html>

On January 21, 2020, after three Witnesses spent a day in the temporary detention center, the Vakhitovsky District Court of Kazan released Tatyana Obizhestvit and Lyaysan Bochkareva under house arrest. Meanwhile, Laysan's husband, Andrey Bochkarev, was put in pre-trial detention. During the search, security officials said they were looking for weapons, drugs, and "everything that is related to Jehovah."

[Continue reading](#)

21.01.2020 - Aleksandr Polozov successfully appealed the preventive measure, released from pre-trial detention

Link to the full text in Russian: <https://www.jw-russia.org/news/2020/01/17.html>

On January 14, 2020, the Krasnoyarsk Regional Court granted the complaint of Aleksandr Polozov regarding the preventive measure and released him from the pre-trial detention center. The decision of the lower Norilsk City Court has been canceled. Meanwhile, in fact, Aleksandr was released only on January 21, to await trial for his faith under recognizance agreement. The believer from Norilsk was imprisoned for almost three months.

[Continue reading](#)

21.01.2020 - Six years in prison conditionally. In Primorye Territory, a verdict is handed down to believer Grigoriy Bubnov

Link to the full text in Russian: <https://www.jw-russia.org/news/2020/01/14.html>

On January 21, 2020, Natalya Derevyagina, a judge of the Nadezhdinsky District Court of Primorye Territory, recognized Grigoriy Bubnov guilty of organizing the activities of an extremist organization (Part 1 of Article 282.2 of the Criminal Code of the Russian

Federation). The prosecutor's office had requested that he be sentenced to seven years in prison.

[Continue reading](#)

20.01.2020 - Mass detentions in Kazan: Department for combating organized crime finds out why people aged 9 to 80 read the Bible

Link to the full text in Russian: <https://www.jw-russia.org/news/2020/01/12.html>

On the morning of January 19, 2020, in Kazan, law enforcement officers detained about 15 believers, including two children and two women over the age of 80. All of them were interrogated using psychological pressure about who forces them to read the Bible. Some believers have been searched and detained.

[Continue reading](#)

16.01.2020 - First criminal case for faith opened in Achinsk. Earlier, "crime instrument" was seized-The Bible

Link to the full text in Russian: <https://www.jw-russia.org/news/2020/01/4.html>

On January 9, 2020, in Achinsk (Krasnoyarsk Territory), a criminal case was opened against Viktor Sagin, 62. The man is accused under Part 1 of Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code (organization of extremist activities) because of his religious views, despite the complete absence of victims or damage.

[Continue reading](#)

Three more Jehovah's Witness "extremism" convictions

As criminal trials of people exercising freedom of religion continue, three more Jehovah's Witnesses have been convicted of "extremist activity". Grigory Bubnov was given a six-year suspended jail sentence while Roman Markin and Viktor Trofimov were each fined about a year's average local wages. The Judge ordered two of Bubnov's Bibles to be destroyed. The court has not explained why.

By Victoria Arnold

Forum 18 (24.01.2020) - <https://bit.ly/36yvOSR> - Courts in Arctic Russia and the Far East have found three Jehovah's Witnesses guilty of "extremist activity" for meeting to pray and read the Bible. Two were fined about one year's average local wages while the third was given a suspended six-year jail term. This brings to 19 the total number of people convicted under the Extremism Law since the Supreme Court's ban on Jehovah's Witness activity.

After earlier trials, 11 Muslim and Jehovah's Witness prisoners of conscience are in jail for exercising freedom of religion or belief in connection with a banned allegedly "extremist" organisation (see list below).

On 21 January, Nadezhdinsky District Court in Primorye convicted 54-year-old Grigory Bubnov. The Judge handed him a suspended six-year prison sentence, plus various restrictions on his freedom during his five-year probation period (see below).

The Judge also ordered two Bibles to be destroyed. The Court has not answered Forum 18's questions about why this was ordered. Officials have also not answered Forum 18's other questions about the cases (see below).

On 24 January, Polyarny District Court in Murmansk Region convicted 45-year-old Roman Markin and 62-year-old Viktor Trofimov and fined each of them about a year's average local wages. The fines were originally about double that, but were reduced because of time spent in pre-trial detention (see below).

Bubnov, Markin and Trofimov all intend to appeal against their convictions (see below).

The trial of Venera Dulova and Aleksandr Pryanikov, and Dulova's daughter Darya Dulova at Karpinsk City Court (Sverdlovsk Region), which has run from 14 August 2019, is expected to end on 27 January. Prosecutors have requested three-year suspended prison sentences for Venera Dulova and Pryanikov, and a two-year suspended prison sentence for Darya Dulova (see below).

The most recent prison term – of six years – was handed down to 55-year-old Vladimir Alushkin in Penza in December 2019. His wife Tatyana was among five others convicted (see below).

A further 270 or so Jehovah's Witnesses currently face possible prosecution under Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 1 ("Organisation of"), or Part 2 ("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"), or Part 1.1 ("Inclination, recruitment or other involvement of a person in an extremist organisation"), as well as Criminal Code Article 282.3, Part 1 ("Financing of extremist activity") (see below).

There are currently 11 Muslim and Jehovah's Witness prisoners of conscience in jail for exercising their freedom of religion and belief in connection with a banned allegedly "extremist" organisation (see full list at end of this article).

Suspended jail sentence in Far East, Bibles ordered destroyed

On 21 January, Grigory Gennadyevich Bubnov (born 4 September 1965) received a suspended six-year prison sentence at Nadezhdinsky District Court in Primorye, plus various restrictions on his freedom during his five-year period of probation.

Prosecutors had asked for seven years' imprisonment in a general-regime labour camp ("correctional colony") for Bubnov, but Judge Natalya Derevyagina refused this after a total of 20 hearings over seven months from 31 May 2019. Bubnov intends to challenge his conviction, Jehovah's Witnesses stated on 21 January 2020.

Primorye Regional Prosecutor's Office has not answered Forum 18's written questions (put to it on 21 January, before Bubnov's sentencing) about why it sought a jail sentence, why meetings for prayer and Bible reading were considered a criminal offence, and who had been harmed by Bubnov's alleged activities. Since the sentence was issued, the Prosecutor's Office has also not answered Forum 18's written question as to whether prosecutors plan to appeal.

Bubnov is the first Jehovah's Witness not to have been jailed after being convicted under 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"). If his appeal is unsuccessful, he will be left with a criminal record.

In addition, Judge Derevyagina upheld the prosecutors' request that Bubnov should be barred from participating in public organisations for five years, and from the locations of public events for one year. He was also placed on probation for five years.

She also decided that two Bibles seized during investigators' searches of Jehovah's Witness homes should be destroyed when the ruling comes into force.

Nadezhdinsky District Court has not answered Forum 18's 22 January written question about why the two Bibles were ordered to be destroyed.

If Bubnov's appeal fails and the Judge's verdict enters into force, he will be on probation for the maximum period of five years. If he is convicted of another offence during this time, he may have to serve the full six years in prison, as well as any sentence imposed for the later offence. While on probation, Bubnov will not be able to move house or change his place of work without informing probation authorities.

Investigative Committee, police, and FSB security service officials raided three Jehovah's Witness homes in the village of Razdolnoye on 19 July 2018. They arrested Bubnov with nine other people. Investigators took them away for questioning to the village of Volno-Nadezhdinskoye, where interrogations continued until late at night.

The Jehovah's Witnesses were all then released, but investigators placed Bubnov under travel restrictions and opened a criminal case against him, in which he was accused of "the implementation of organisational actions to convene and hold meetings, [and] the unbroken continuation of the activities of a religious association".

Neither Primorye Region Investigative Committee nor the Primorye Region branch of the FSB have answered Forum 18's 21 January written questions about why meetings for prayer and Bible reading are considered a criminal offence, and who had been harmed by Bubnov's alleged activities.

Unlike many other Jehovah's Witnesses, both in Primorye and elsewhere in Russia, Bubnov was not detained or put under house arrest during the investigation or his trial. On 11 July 2019, his name was added to the Rosfinmonitoring "List of Terrorists and Extremists", whose assets banks are obliged to freeze (although small transactions are permitted).

According to federal tax records, Bubnov was not a founder member of the Volno-Nadezhinskoye Jehovah's Witness local religious organisation (the only one in the district), and this community was voluntarily dissolved in 2016 before the nationwide ban.

Most other Jehovah's Witness communities were liquidated through the courts.

Murmansk Region sentences

On 24 January 2020, Judge Viktoriya Loginova imposed fines of 300,000 Roubles and 350,000 Roubles respectively on Roman Nikolayevich Markin (born 18 March 1974) and Viktor Fyodorovich Trofimov (born 26 March 1957), after a total of 21 hearings at Polyarny District Court over the last eight months from 28 May 2019.

At the men's previous appearance on 15 January 2020, prosecutors had requested jail sentences of 6 years for Markin, and 6 years and 5 months for Trofimov.

"We are happy for Roman, Viktor, and their families that the court did not sentence them to prison," Jehovah's Witnesses commented on 24 January. "However, it remains an injustice for these peaceful men to be convicted and stigmatised as 'extremists'."

300,000 Roubles amounts to almost 11 months' average wages in the men's home town of Polyarny, while 350,000 Roubles is equivalent to more than a year's wages. According to a court press release on 24 January, Judge Loginova in fact handed down fines of 650,000 and 600,000 Roubles to Trofimov and Markin respectively, but that these figures were reduced to take account of the time the two men spent in detention and under house arrest.

Polyarny District Court stated in the press release that Trofimov and Markin, "using the internet, by means of a conference call, organised and conducted collective religious cult activities with participants of an illegal religious organisation located in the town of Polyarny .. including the study, under their direction, of religious literature on the beliefs of Jehovah's Witnesses, [and] prayers to the god Jehovah, and also organised the collection of funds for the activities of a liquidated religious organisation under the guise of donations.

On 15 January, Roman Markin argued in his final speech that the Supreme Court's 2017 ruling applies to the activities of legal entities, including the Polyarny Jehovah's Witness local religious organisation, not to the activities of individual believers.

Markin pointed out that, nevertheless, investigators' attentions had all been directed at the latter rather than the former: "Moreover, an FSB operative later stated, here in the courtroom, during his testimony, that it was not forbidden to get together, study the Bible and preach."

"At the appeal hearing on [pre-trial detention], the judge announced that I was being tried for violation of the constitutional order," Markin continued. "But how is it possible to violate the constitutional system, using only the rights granted by the Constitution, namely, Article 28? How can singing songs based on biblical verses, offering prayers to Almighty God Jehovah, and studying the Bible harm the state and individual citizens?"

Markin also noted that "there have been no destructive consequences of the activities of neither the Polyarny Jehovah's Witness local religious organisation, which existed until April 2017, nor the gathering of Polyarny Jehovah's Witnesses, namely: the destruction of the constitutional order, or harm to individual citizens".

Murmansk Regional Prosecutor's Office has not answered Forum 18's 20 January written questions about why it was seeking a jail sentence, why meetings for prayer and Bible reading were considered a criminal offence, and who had been harmed by Markin and Trofimov's alleged activities.

Murmansk Region Investigative Committee opened the criminal case against Markin and Trofimov under 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") on 12 April 2018.

The case was opened after Jehovah's Witnesses in the town of Polyarny had been under surveillance by the FSB security service for several months. It became clear in court that hidden cameras had been placed in their homes.

Neither Murmansk Region Investigative Committee nor the Murmansk Region branch of the FSB have answered Forum 18's 20 January written questions about why they carried out the hidden surveillance, why meetings for prayer and Bible reading were considered a criminal offence, and who had been harmed by Markin and Trofimov's alleged activities.

Markin and Trofimov were arrested along with 11 others during armed raids on seven houses in Polyarny on 18 April 2019. At Markin's home, officers forced him and his 16-year-old daughter to lie on the floor and threatened them with weapons. The two men were then placed in pre-trial detention.

Murmansk Region Investigation Committee has not answered Forum 18's 23 April 2019 written question about why armed force was used in the raids.

Markin and Trofimov's alleged "crime" had originally been detected by the Russian Navy's Northern Fleet branch of the FSB security service. The Murmansk Region Investigation Committee claimed: "The suspects, reliably aware of [the ban on Jehovah's Witness activity], during the period from April 2017 to the present, on the territory of Aleksandrovska [a closed military district - ZATO] in Polyarny, organised the activities of the religious organisation by convening and holding meetings, organising the recruitment of new members, and bringing the contents of texts of religious literature to gatherings' participants".

The two men were released from detention and placed under house arrest on 10 October 2018. On 7 February 2019, they were released from house arrest but placed under travel restrictions for the remainder of the investigation period and their trial.

Karpinsk trial to end soon?

The trial of Venera Dulova and Aleksandr Pryanikov, and Dulova's daughter Darya Dulova, is expected to end on 27 January 2020 at Karpinsk City Court (Sverdlovsk Region). The trial began on 14 August 2019.

The three are on trial under Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 2 ("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 20 January 2020, prosecutors requested three-year suspended prison sentences for Venera Dulova and Pryanikov, and a two-year prison sentence for Darya Dulova.

Charged for exercising freedom of religion and belief, no torturers charged

Prosecutors normally charge Jehovah's Witnesses under Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 1 ("Organisation of"), or Part 2 ("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"), or Part 1.1 ("Inclination, recruitment or other involvement of a person in an extremist organisation"), as well as Criminal Code Article 282.3, Part 1 ("Financing of extremist activity").

As of 17 January, about 270 more Jehovah's Witnesses faced possible prosecution under these charges, Jehovah's Witnesses state. For comparison, in February 2019, 119

Jehovah's Witnesses were known to have been charged or named as suspects in such "extremism"-related cases.

Muslim readers of works by the late Turkish theologian Said Nursi are also prosecuted under "anti-extremism" legislation and have been imprisoned or fined for involvement in the banned "extremist" organisation "Nurdzhular", which Muslims in Russia deny exists. Typically, such Muslims meet in private homes to study Islam, with one or more expounding on Nursi's works. They also pray, eat, and drink tea together, and do not seek official permission to meet.

Between June 2017 and June 2018, six Muslim men were jailed for periods of between two and eight years for meeting together to study Nursi's works. All were convicted under Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 1 or Part 2.

Contrary to Russia's international legal obligations, no official responsible for the torture of seven Jehovah's Witnesses in 2019 has been arrested or put on criminal trial. One of the Jehovah's Witness victims was re-arrested after reporting the torture, and two of the officials implicated have been given awards. Similarly, none has been punished for the 2015 torture of a Muslim who reads Nursi's works.

Restrictions for about 270 facing trial

Twenty five of about 270 Jehovah's Witnesses who are suspects, have been charged, or are on trial are in pre-trial detention, and 24 are under house arrest. The rest are under travel restrictions, other specific restrictions (such as night-time curfews and bans on phone and internet use), undertakings to present themselves to investigators when summoned, or no known restrictions.

Many of these are also on the Rosfinmonitoring "List of Terrorists and Extremists", whose assets banks are obliged to freeze (although small transactions are permitted).

The current investigations, raids, detentions, and jailings of Jehovah's Witnesses are a direct result of the Supreme Court's 2017 ban on their activity throughout Russia, and its decision that the Jehovah's Witness Administrative Centre and all 395 local communities are "extremist organisations".

From January 2018 onwards, the authorities have pursued a policy of frequent raids and searches of Jehovah's Witness homes across Russia, an intensification of the less frequent raids which took place before the Jehovah's Witnesses were banned in 2017.

The raids often involve heavily armed riot police or National Guard troops carrying machine guns, despite the fact that Jehovah's Witnesses worldwide take a pacifist stance and will not perform compulsory military service or any other military-connected activity. The raids are usually led by the Investigative Committee, but officers of the FSB security service and the police Centre for Combating Extremism have also participated.

On 10 June 2019, Russian Human Rights Ombudsperson Tatyana Moskalkova commented in her annual report for 2018 that "These events [the conviction and imprisonment of Danish citizen Dennis Christensen – see below] raise questions about the existence of a conflict between the constitutional right to practice one's religion individually or jointly with others, and the signs of extremist activity specified in Article 282.2 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation".

As well as raids, detentions, and criminal prosecutions, Jehovah's Witnesses also face the loss of property and other problems. Young Jehovah's Witness men have been denied

their right to perform alternative civilian service rather than military service, and Jehovah's Witness employees have been fired or forced to resign from their jobs.

The children of Jehovah's Witnesses have also faced threats and bullying by the authorities.

Criminal prosecutions

Primorye Region has the highest number of Jehovah's Witnesses – 23 – who have been subject to criminal prosecution since the 2017 ban. This figure includes Bubnov and five others who are currently on trial – Dmitry Malevany, Aleksey Trofimov, Olga Panyuta, and Olga Opaleva at Spassk District Court, and Dmitry Barmakin at Pervorechensk District Court in Vladivostok; on 12 November 2019, Vladivostok's Lenin District Court returned the case against another seven Jehovah's Witnesses to prosecutors.

Other regions with particularly high numbers of prosecutions are: Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Region – 22; Jewish Autonomous Region – 14; Magadan Region – 13; Khabarovsk Region – 12; Kirov Region – 11; Stavropol Region – 11; and Nizhny Novgorod Region – 11.

Current sentenced prisoners of conscience

There are currently 11 prisoners of conscience being held after being sentenced for their exercise of freedom of religion and belief in connection with a banned allegedly "extremist" organisation:

On 7 November 2017, Muslim reader of Nursi's works Artur Abdulgamidovich Kaltuyev was sentenced to three years in a labour camp ("correctional colony").

On 28 May 2018, Muslim reader of Nursi's work's Ilgar Vagif-ogly Aliyev was sentenced to eight years in a labour camp.

On 6 February 2019, Jehovah's Witness and Danish citizen Dennis Christensen was sentenced to six years in a labour camp.

On 19 September 2019, a court in Saratov jailed six Jehovah's Witnesses:

- 1) Konstantin Viktorovich Bazhenov was jailed for three years and six months;
- 2) Aleksey Vladimirovich Budenchuk was jailed for three years and six months;
- 3) Feliks Khasanovich Makhammadiyev was jailed for three years;
- 4) Roman Aleksandrovich Gridasov was jailed for two years;
- 5) Gennady Vasilyevich German was jailed for two years;
- 6) and Aleksey Petrovich Miretsky was jailed for two years.

On 5 November 2019, a court in Tomsk sentenced one Jehovah's Witness to imprisonment:

- 1) Sergei Gennadyevich Klimov (born 26 March 1970), six years.

On 13 December 2019, a court in Penza convicted six Jehovah's Witnesses and sentenced one to imprisonment:

- 1) Vladimir Aleksandrovich Alushkin (born 30 June 1964), six years.

Sentence completed but held for deportation

On 19 June 2017, Muslim reader of Nursi's work's Yevgeny Lvovich Kim was sentenced to three years and nine months in a labour camp. After his arrest on 26 December 2015, he was tortured in pre-trial detention. On his release on 10 April 2019, he was immediately taken to a court where he was stripped of Russian citizenship – because officials had confiscated his documents the day before – leaving Kim stateless. He has since been in detention awaiting deportation to his country of birth, Uzbekistan, of which he has never been a citizen.

Special Bimonthly FORB Digest (01-15.01.2020)

Jehovah's Witnesses

15.01.2020 – Six and more years in prison requested for believers Markin and Trofimov. Witnesses in Penza to hear verdict on January 22

Link to the full text in Russian: <https://www.jw-russia.org/news/2020/01/2.html>

On January 15, 2020, a parties' presentation in the case against believers accused of extremist activity began in the Polarny District Court of the Murmansk Region. The verdict will be announced on January 22, 2020, at 3:00 pm at the address: town of Polarny, st. Sivko, 2.

[Continue reading](#)

13.01.2020 - Multiple Jehovah's Witnesses convicted in Penza

Link to the full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2020/01/1552.html>

On 27 December 2019, in Penza, law enforcement officers arrested two women on the pretense of seeking fraudsters. As it turned out later, the real reason for the arrest was religious convictions. One of the security agents bragged that "I jailed Alushkin."

[Continue reading](#)

13.01.2020 - In Kirov, the investigator considered a 70-year-old Witness an extremist. He faces up to 10 years in prison

Link to the full text in Russian: <https://www.jw-russia.org/news/2020/01/1551.html>

In January, it became known that in Kirov, 70-year-old Yevgeniy Udintsev was charged as an organizer of an extremist organization. A few months earlier, he and other believers were searched.

[Continue reading](#)

13.01.2020 - Court of Appeal upholds criminal sentence for Aleksey Metsger for believing in Jehovah God

Link to the full text in Russian: <https://www.jw-russia.org/news/2020/01/1550.html>

On January 13, 2020, the Perm Regional Court upheld the decision of a lower court to punish Aleksey Metsger for practicing his religion. He will be fined 350,000 rubles.

[Continue reading](#)

10.01.2020 – On Monday, the Perm Regional Court will consider the complaint of Aleksey Metsger on a criminal conviction for faith

Link to the full text in Russian: <https://www.jw-russia.org/news/2020/01/1546.html>

On January 13, 2020, an appeal hearing will be held in the Perm Regional Court on the complaint of Aleksey Metzger, who was [convicted](#) two months ago of a criminal offense for faith (with a fine of 350,000 rubles). The hearing starts at 9:30 local time. Court address: Perm, Ekaterininskaia st., 33.

[Continue reading](#)

09.01.2020 - Jehovah's Witnesses trial to go on in Far East

Link to the full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/cases/yelizovo.html>

On 9 January 2020, the Kamchatka territorial court overturned the decision of the Elizovo district court returning a case to the prosecutor. This means that the criminal case against the Bazhenov couple and 73-year-old Vera Zolotova will again be sent to the Elizovo district court for consideration on the merits.

[Continue reading](#)

07.01.2020 – Religious strife in action: In the Krasnoyarsk Territory, a believer found his car damaged

Link to the full text in Russian: <https://www.jw-russia.org/news/2020/01/1542.html>

On the morning of December 29, 2019, Kirill Mikhailin from the village of Sukhobuzimskoye (Krasnoyarsk Territory) discovered his car's windshield broken, and next to it was a note with an obscene word and mention of Jehovah. Kirill's family have received threats in connection with their religion.

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06.01.2020 – When your relative smells like a jail: Entire families in Russia are under persecution for beliefs

Link to the full text in Russian: <https://www.jw-russia.org/news/2020/01/1539.html>

Among the hundreds of respectable citizens for whom criminal cases have been unfairly instituted, there are whole families — married couples, parents, and children. We publish in Russian a review of how false accusations tear apart loved ones, shattering their lives.

[Continue reading](#)

03.01.2020 – In Karachay-Cherkessia, security forces searched for extremist literature from the mother of many children

Full text in Russian: <https://www.jw-russia.org/news/2020/01/1520.html>

A few months before the December raids in Cherkessk, security forces in the village of Ordzhonikidzevsky ransacked the home of an unwed mother raising four children. This happened back in June 2019, but the details became known only now.

[Continue reading](#)

03.01.2020- How Jehovah's Witnesses are persecuted in Karachay-Cherkessia 2010-2020

Link to the full text in Russian: <https://www.jw-russia.org/news/2020/01/1524.html>

At least until February 11, 2020, Albert Batchaev, 43, of Cherkessk, will be in jail. What events in the republic preceded his arrest over the past ten years?

[Continue reading](#)

03.01.2020 – Investigators replenish the list of 'elderly extremists' with believers from Nevinnomyssk

Link to the full text in Russian: <https://www.jw-russia.org/news/2020/01/1523.html>

On December 12, 2019, in Nevinnomyssk (Stavropol Territory), the Investigative Committee opened criminal proceedings under two "extremist" articles against eight believers, the oldest of whom is 89 years old and the youngest being 54. It is apparent law enforcement officials decided to intensify the persecution of peaceful elderly Jehovah's Witnesses.

[Continue reading](#)

02.01.2020 – Hunting the Elderly: Security forces list older women in the ranks of extremists

Link to the full text in Russian: <https://www.jw-russia.org/news/2020/01/1514.html>

Special forces rush against a defenseless older woman. As a result of the intrusion, she suffers the pains, requiring the use of an ambulance and hospitalization to deal with her debilitating health effects. For some time, she was under surveillance — her prayers, her reading, her singing, and her talking with others about Jehovah God. In the eyes of security officials, she is an "extremist." At least 20 Russian women from 60 to 87 years have gone through this scenario.

[Continue reading](#)

02.1.2020 – Prisoner for faith is forbidden to take necessary medicine in the Kursk pre-trial detention center. His condition is critical

Link to the full text in Russian: <https://www.jw-russia.org/news/2020/01/1518.html>

The management and doctors of the Kursk pre-trial detention center refuse to properly treat Artem Bagratyan, 47, who was arrested for reading the Bible, meeting with fellow believers, and talking with others about the Bible. He has diabetes and hypertension; his condition worsens.

[Continue reading](#)

02.01.2020 – Six Jehovah’s Witnesses mistreated in prison

Link to the full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2020/01/1518.html>

The administration and medics of the Kursk SIZO [pre-trial detention cell] are refusing necessary medication for Artem Bagratian, who was arrested for reading the Bible, meeting with fellow believers, and conversing with others about the Bible. The 47-year-old Artem has diabetes and hypertension and his condition has worsened sharply.

Artem was arrested along with his wife, Alevtina, and other believers in Kursk on 16 October 2019 on a charge of extremism. Since then both spouses and their friend Andrei Andreev have been held in custody in SIZO No. 1 for Kursk oblast.

[Continue reading](#)

Escalating persecution of Jehovah’s Witnesses

Arrests, Prison, Harassment for Peaceful Religious Practice

Human Rights Watch (09.01.2020) - <http://bit.ly/2snXE6h> - Law enforcement authorities across Russia have dramatically escalated the nationwide persecution of Jehovah’s Witnesses in the past 12 months, Human Rights Watch said today. One year after President Vladimir Putin said that the crackdown against them should be “looked into,” the numbers of house raids and people under criminal investigation have more than doubled, and 32 Jehovah’s Witnesses worshipers are behind bars for peacefully practicing their faith.

At least 313 people are facing charges, are on trial, or have been convicted of criminal “extremism” for engaging in Jehovah’s Witnesses’ activities, or are suspects in such cases. About two-thirds of them found out about their status as suspect or accused in 2019. Authorities have carried out at least 780 house raids since 2017 in more than 70 towns and cities across Russia, more than half of them in 2019. Courts convicted 18 people in 2019, nine of whom received prison sentences ranging from two to six years, for such activities as leading or participating in prayer meetings. Verdicts are expected in several cases later in January.

“For Jehovah’s Witnesses in Russia, practicing their faith means risking their freedom,” said Rachel Denber, deputy Europe and Central Asia director at Human Rights Watch. “There is nothing remotely justifiable about this. It’s time for President Putin to ensure that law enforcement stop this harmful persecution.”

Russian authorities should release detained Jehovah’s Witnesses immediately, drop any outstanding charges, expunge all related criminal records, and halt their persecution, Human Rights Watch said.

Human Rights Watch interviewed two lawyers defending Jehovah's Witnesses in numerous regions, and the spouses of seven men convicted or facing charges of engaging in Jehovah's Witnesses activity. Human Rights Watch also reviewed court verdicts and other documents, media reports, and Russian government statements.

The raids and arrests stem from an April 2017 Russian Supreme Court ruling that banned all Jehovah's Witnesses organizations in Russia. It declared the Jehovah's Witnesses Administrative Center, the head office for 395 Jehovah's Witnesses branches throughout Russia, an extremist organization and ruled that all branches should be shut down. The ruling blatantly violates Russia's obligations to respect and protect religious freedom and freedom of association, Human Rights Watch said.

Russian authorities should reverse the ban on the organization's activities and remove the "extremist" designation, Human Rights Watch said. They should allow Jehovah's Witnesses to freely practice their faith.

In his December 2018 meeting with the Presidential Human Rights Council, Putin said that people of all faiths should be treated equally, and that it was "nonsense" to treat people who practice faiths that are not "traditional" for Russia like members of "destructive" organizations. He said he was not aware of the Jehovah's Witnesses prosecutions and that he would speak with the chair of Russia's Supreme Court to analyze the matter.

Most of those targeted are men, though at least 39 women have faced charges. Most targeted are middle-aged, although ages have ranged from an 89-year-old woman named as a suspect in a December 2019 criminal investigation in Stavropol region and an 85-year-old woman on trial in Vladivostok to a 19-year-old woman in Sverdlovsk region charged in May 2019. Most are charged under art. 282.2 of the criminal code, for either organizing or participating in the activities of an organization banned by a court as "extremist."

Local police carried out the house raids, often with armed and masked Rosgvardia (National Guard) personnel, special rapid reaction police, and Federal Security Service (FSB) officers. They confiscated Bibles and other religious materials, computers, phones, and other personal items and rounded up residents for questioning.

In many cases, including those Human Rights Watch documented, the authorities had been conducting surveillance on people for months, including recording or photographing them at prayer meetings, praying, singing, or reading.

In late December, 12 people were released from pretrial detention pending trial, including two people who had been detained for 521 days. At least 23 of those under criminal investigation remain in pretrial detention. Since the crackdown began in 2017, almost 150 people have spent time in pretrial custody, 41 for six months or more, according to data provided by the Jehovah's Witnesses organization. Andrzej Oniszcuk, a Polish citizen, spent 344 days in pretrial detention in Kirov, until his release in September 2019, pending trial. During this time, he was unable to see his wife or family. At least 28 are being held under house arrest.

Polls show a rising concern in Russia about freedom of speech, information, and religion. An October Levada Center poll found that 40 percent of people surveyed viewed freedom of religion as the most important right, a double digit increase since a similar 2017 poll. In April and August, the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention issued opinions on two cases of Jehovah's Witnesses arrested for their religious activity. In both, the working group found the detentions were arbitrary, lacked legal basis, and violated the rights to freedom of religion, to liberty and security, and to equality before the law.

The European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) has a case pending against the Russian government, filed by the Jehovah's Witnesses over the Supreme Court ruling. In 2010, the ECtHR held Russia in violation of the European Convention on Human Rights, for closing the Moscow branch of the Jehovah's Witnesses and refusing to allow the group to re-register. The court found violations of arts. 9 and 11 of the convention, which protect freedom of religion and association, respectively.

"This persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses for their faith is wrong and unlawful," Denber said. "They should be allowed to worship on an equal basis with everyone else, without fear of being arrested or harassed."

For details about the criminal cases and house searches, please see below.

Jehovah's Witnesses sentenced to prison in 2019 include: In Oryol, Dennis Christensen, a Danish citizen, six years; In Saratov, Roman Gridasov, Gennady German, Aleksey Miretsky, Konstantin Bazhenov, Alexey Budenchuk, and Felix Makhammadiyev, two to three-and-a-half years; In Tomsk, Sergei Klimov, six years; and in Penza, Vladimir Alushkin, six years.

Also in 2019, five other people received suspended prison sentences and are subject to travel restrictions, several were fined, and one person was sentenced to 2.2 years' community service.

"Evidence" and Surveillance

Most of the Jehovah's Witnesses under prosecution are charged with engaging in the activities of an "extremist" organization (art. 282.2, part 2 of the Russian criminal code). Some have also been charged with organizing activities of an "extremist" organization (art. 282.2, part 1). Evidence of "criminal" conduct in these cases includes regular aspects of communal religious life, including reading the Bible at a Bible study session, participating in a worship gathering, or hosting people in a home for Bible readings or worship.

Human Rights Watch reviewed four verdicts against people convicted under art. 282.2 part 2. Key evidence used in the September 2019 guilty verdict against Valery Moskalenko was that he had participated in a three-hour worship and Bible study session in a hotel conference room in Khabarovsk. A court in Khabarovsk sentenced Moskalenko to two years and two months of community service, barred him from leaving his municipality for the duration of his community service, and imposed other restrictions.

Among the actions grounding the July 2019 guilty verdict against Aleksandr Solovev was that he tried to persuade people to continue to worship with Jehovah's Witnesses, after they had criticized the faith and expressed an intent to cease their involvement; that he participated in a Jehovah's Witnesses meeting, where he stood near the door and "maintained order"; and that he recruited members. The court fined him 300,000 rubles (approximately US\$4,830).

Sergei Skrynnikov's April 1, 2019 verdict, handed down by a court in Oryol, stemmed mainly from preaching at a gathering, during which he urged worshippers to "be courageous." Skrynnikov was fined 350,000 rubles (US\$5,600).

In its August 2019 opinion on Alushkin's arrest and pretrial detention, the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention noted that Russian authorities had incriminated Alushkin for "holding conversations in public places and residential premises with the inhabitants of the city of Penza ... recruiting new members from among their relatives, friends, and

residents of the city of Penza,” and holding religious services “to study their ideology.” The opinion said that in doing so, “Mr. Alushkin did nothing more than exercise his right to freedom of religion under art. 18 of the [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights] and for this he was detained by the authorities and ultimately spent six months in pretrial detention.” The working group concluded that “Mr. Alushkin should not have been arrested and held in pretrial detention and no trial of Mr. Alushkin should take place ... All the activities that Mr. Alushkin engaged in were entirely peaceful religious discussions.”

On December 13, 2019, he was sentenced to six years for organizing the activities of an “extremist” organization.

Evidence of engaging in upkeep of Jehovah’s Witnesses places of worship has also been grounds for charges of involvement in an extremist organization. The spouse of a Jehovah’s Witnesses worshiper facing criminal charges said that her husband’s payment of utility bills for the former Jehovah’s Witnesses meeting house in their town was used as evidence of his participation in an extremist organization.

Based on media reports, information published by the Jehovah’s Witnesses organization, and lawyers who have represented numerous Jehovah’s Witnesses facing criminal charges, the authorities conducted surveillance on suspects’ activities, conversations, and homes. The authorities secretly took photos and recorded videos during religious meetings or other gatherings, when members would discuss the Bible, sing, and the like. Artur Leontiev and Irina Krasnikova, lawyers who represent Jehovah’s Witnesses, told Human Rights Watch that the authorities planted people in Jehovah’s Witnesses meetings or who otherwise feigned interest in the Jehovah’s Witnesses to take photos and videos that were later used as evidence against their clients.

Leontiev said that Klimov, his client, was under surveillance for 10 months before he was detained. Klimov’s wife said that in the months leading to her husband’s arrest, they could hear their phone conversations being recorded and see strangers standing in front of their home. “It gives me chills up my spine,” Yulia Klimova said.

Leontiev recalled an incident in which two men claiming they were repair technicians arrived unannounced to his client’s home in October 2017 to fix a faulty internet connection. They apparently meddled with the man’s personal computer, downloading files and changing several passwords. Nearly a year later, his client was arrested. Leontiev and his client believe the repair technicians were from the security services, although it is not known whether any of the downloaded information is being used against Leontiev’s client.

Raids and Searches

The Jehovah’s Witnesses organization has recorded 780 search-and-seizure raids on Jehovah’s Witnesses’ homes and apartments in Russia since 2018. Of these, 491 took place in 2019, and in October 2019 alone, there were 83 house raids across Russia, the highest monthly count since 2017.

In some cases reported by the media, law enforcement forces carried out multiple raids across a city in a single day. For instance, over 30 home raids took place on July 17, 2019 in Nizhniy Novgorod and about 20 on October 10 in Sochi.

Many raids took place very early in the morning. Irina Bazhenova, whose husband, Konstantin, a Jehovah’s Witness, was sentenced in September 2019 to three-and-a-half years, said that in June 2018, police arrived at the apartment next to the one where she and her husband were staying. The police banged loudly on the neighbor’s door at around 6 a.m., until Konstantin came out to see what the commotion was about.

Jehovah's Witnesses and their families said they felt shocked, confused, and psychologically pressured when armed men showed up at their door. In most cases HRW documented, the raids were conducted by two vanloads of law enforcement personnel, each with 6 to 10 people. Tatiana Budenchuk, however, said that at least 25 officers were present during the raid on her home in June 2018.

Budenchuk said, "It was early in the morning, around 6:30 a.m. Two mini-buses of men came filled with SOBR [rapid reaction police] in addition to two other smaller cars. In total there were about 25 to 30 people that came to our house."

Some people said they had no time to dress fully and had to sit for hours while their homes were searched and ransacked. Irina Bazhenova said that during the raid, which lasted more than six hours, her husband was kept in handcuffs, and neither of them was allowed to use the bathroom. Klimova said she and her husband were forced to stand against the wall guarded by armed men while officers searched her home, and Tatiana Alushkina said she and her husband had to stand with their hands behind their backs while their homes were searched.

Budenchuk said that the noise and commotion upset her children, an infant and an elementary school pupil. She also said that police refused to close the front door even though she asked to keep the early morning chill away from her baby.

Some of the people said they live in quiet residential areas, where the presence of the police vans drew attention to their home.

In most cases, law enforcement showed a search warrant, but in the chaos of the raids, residents had little time to read the document. Alushkina recalled that when 10 men, three masked and armed, showed up at her home on July 15, 2019 they showed a document to her husband, but she did not see it.

In most cases reported by the Jehovah's Witnesses, the places raided were homes, including those where Jehovah's Witnesses had held Bible study or worship. A few of the raids were during informal prayer gatherings.

Alushkina said that on July 15, 2018, she was hosting a few friends in her home in Penza for Bible study when the men burst into the room where her husband, Vladimir, was reading the Bible. They showed him a warrant, put his hands behind his back, and searched the house for four hours, after which they took the couple and their guests to the Investigative Committee in Penza for questioning. "It was difficult to understand at the time what was happening and who they were, but we were taken to the ... 'Tsenter E' [Anti-Extremism Department], where we were all interrogated," Alushkina said.

Criminal charges were eventually filed against Alushkin and several other men present that day, as well as against Alushkina. She was among the four co-defendants in the case who received a suspended two-year sentence on December 13, 2019.

In October 2019 police raided a campsite in Norilsk, where more than 50 Jehovah's Witnesses followers had gathered to pray. Members of the Jehovah's Witnesses community close to those at the campsite said that 15 armed and masked special operations police stormed loudly into the camp, photographed worshipers, and forced them to hand over all electronic devices and to write down their passcodes.

During raids, officers typically confiscated personal belongings, many of which have not been returned. These include smartphones, tablets, computers, flash and hard drives, and any religious materials, including Bibles, song books, and religious texts.

Elvira Gridasova, from Saratov, said, "They took old phones, my daughter's old phone that we had at our house, postcards, letters, photos..."

Two Jehovah's Witnesses from different regions said that police also took their bank cards, and one said they took money. One person said the officers took their passport but returned it later.

They took my Sberbank card," said Nadezhda German. "That was my only way to pay for our vacation. We were preparing to go to Georgia, but of course we were unable to go after this." German ended up going on vacation later, without her husband. Reporting by Novaya Gazeta and Kommersant about the February 2019 raid in Surgut also included accounts of police confiscating Jehovah's Witnesses' bank cards.

The authorities have demanded people's phone passcodes and personal information. According to Yaroslav Sivulskiy, press secretary for the Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia, during the raid on the worship camp in Norilsk, police also demanded passcodes from children.

Interrogations

Immediately following the searches, law enforcement detained residents and took them to the FSB or Investigative Committee headquarters for questioning.

In some cases, the authorities detained Jehovah's Witnesses in other settings. For example, Novaya Gazeta reported that on June 12, police in Saratov arrested Makhammadiyev and his wife, Zhenya, in a parking lot near a shopping center. Alexey Stupnikov and his wife, Olga, were arrested at the airport at 4 a.m. just before boarding a flight in Krasnoyarsk on July 3, 2018. Throughout that day, 12 raids took place in the city.

Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL), a US government-funded outlet, reported that law enforcement agents in Surgut beat and attempted to suffocate Evgeny Karyak to coerce him to state he was a Jehovah's Witness. Karyak was one of about 40 people rounded up for interrogation in Surgut on February 15, 2019. The Jehovah's Witnesses alleged that several others had been beaten and given electric shocks during interrogation at the local Investigative Committee.

The Investigative Committee spokesman in Surgut, speaking to the RFE/RL reporter, refuted those reports. In August, then-head of the Presidential Council for Civil Society and Human Rights, Mikhail Fedotov, met with Jehovah's Witnesses in Surgut and spoke with them about their ordeal. He declined to comment specifically on the torture accounts, but noted that torture is "an absolutely unacceptable practice."

In some of the cases documented, interrogations lasted for hours and were extremely stressful. Bazhenova said her interrogation lasted four or five hours. She said that two men in front of her asked questions, while two more men stood behind her, which she recalls as both intimidating and stressful.

Klimova, from Tomsk, recalled a particularly stressful interrogation. Immediately following the raid on her home on June 3, 2018, she was held in FSB custody, along with many others whose homes had been raided that day. They were held six to a room without food and water for nearly 12 hours. By the time she was released at 2:30 a.m., she needed medical attention due to the emotional and physical strain.

"I could not understand why [they were questioning us]," she said. "It is not against the law to read the Bible – reading, singing, and talking are not crimes."

Most of the seven women interviewed whose husbands who were later charged said they did not have a lawyer present during their own initial interrogations. Alushkina was charged after her interrogation with participating in an extremist organization, for which a court in Penza issued a two-year suspended sentence on December 13, 2019.

In most cases, people who faced criminal charges had access to lawyers following their detention. However, Stupnikova said that her husband, Andrei, did not have a lawyer until 12 hours after his arrest.

Gridasova said that she and her husband were detained together for questioning, but that her interrogation lasted only about 90 minutes, after which she was released. She then spent 12 hours seeking information before she was finally told her husband's whereabouts.

Law enforcement personnel asked questions about the detainees' religion, the names of participants and leaders, and what they do during meetings. Most people interviewed said they cited art. 51 of the Russian constitution, which guarantees the right not to give self-incriminating evidence or evidence incriminating a close relative, often to the frustration of interrogators.

Several people said that their interrogators handed them statements to sign pledging not to participate in an "extremist" religious organization.

During the Budenchuks' interrogation, a senior investigator twice threatened to have their children taken away from them. At the start of the questioning, "when we were husband and wife being interrogated together, he threatened to take our children from us," Tatiana Budenchuk said. She said the investigator directed the threat at her husband, "to scare him." He repeated it again at the end of her interrogation. No further action was taken on these threats.

Pretrial Custody, House Arrest, Travel Restrictions

Dozens of people have been held for months in pretrial detention centers, where family visits are severely limited. Klimova was barred from seeing her husband for eight months, Stupnikova was unable to see hers for the duration of his four months in pretrial custody, after which he was released to house arrest, and Bazhenova was allowed to see her spouse only after six months.

The spouses of detained Jehovah's Witnesses consistently said that not being able to see their husbands for months at a time was the worst part of their ordeal. Having a loved one in a detention center can place an exceptional burden on family members at home. Stupnikova said that Rosfinmonitoring, the Federal Financial Monitoring Service, froze the family bank accounts, causing additional difficulties.

"We have to do it all on our own: work, buy groceries, meet with the lawyers, go to the detention center," Gridasova said. "And besides, you don't want to go home. There is no one there."

Of those facing criminal charges, 28 are under house arrest and many others have been released on their own recognizance, and ordered not to travel outside their city.

One man who was under house arrest from March 1 to July 2, 2019 was, after his house arrest was lifted, prohibited from using the phone or internet, or interacting with other Jehovah's Witnesses before his trial.

Alushkina said that due to her husband's house arrest, he was unable to do his job as a carpenter and said that emotional and financial support from family and friends had been important. Gridasova said that during the first days of her husband's house arrest she felt "like we weren't able to even live; we felt like we were being watched."

According to Forum 18, an independent religious freedom monitoring group, 166 people charged for involvement with Jehovah's Witnesses are on a list of "terrorists and extremists" maintained by Rosfinmonitoring, including several people whose cases Human Rights Watch documented.

Rosfinmonitoring freezes the asset of individuals on the lists, allowing them to access only small amounts for their living expenses. Leontiev, the lawyer, said that many people are not aware they are on the list, even when they are unable to access their bank accounts.

HRWF Note: As of December 31, 2019, 313 Jehovah's Witnesses became defendants in criminal cases in 52 regions of Russia. During the last year, 18 people received sentences of various types and duration - up to six years in prison. In total, 149 believers have been sent to jail, 84 of them during the year. For the past 12 months, 489 house searches were carried out.