

## **Table of Contents**

- ***Siberian Court Orders Falun Gong Movement Banned***
- ***Special bimonthly FORB (16-30.06.2021)***
- ***Dmitry Golik and Aleksei Berchuk are Jehovah's Witnesses Nr 17 and 18 sentenced to prison in 2021***
- ***Special bimonthly FORB (01-15.06.2021)***
- ***More jailed after "extremist organisation" trials – list***
- ***16 Jehovah's Witnesses sentenced to prison terms since 1 January and behind bars***
- ***Special bimonthly FORB (16-31.05.2021)***
- ***Widened ban on "extremists" exercising religious freedom***
- ***FECRIS says the persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia is propaganda***
- ***Jehovah's Witness Rustam Seidkuliev sentenced to 2.5 years in prison for talking about the Bible***
- ***Special bimonthly FORB (01-15.05.2021)***
- ***SOVA Center annual report on freedom of religion: Restrictions and Challenges in 2020***
- ***Special bimonthly FORB (16-30.04.2021)***
- ***Russian authorities prohibit use of church building***
- ***A case of violation of the right to freely practice one's faith in community pending in Strasbourg***
- ***Campaign: Release Jehovah's Witness Dennis Christensen sentenced to six years in prison!***
- ***Special bimonthly on freedom of religion or belief (01-15.04.2021)***
- ***Special bimonthly on freedom of religion or belief (16-31.03.2021)***
- ***Russia intensifies persecution for reading the Bible in occupied Crimea***
- ***Special bimonthly on freedom of religion or belief (01-15.03.2021)***
- ***Deteriorating religious freedom situation denounced at the OSCE***
- ***Special bimonthly on freedom of religion or belief (16-28.02.2021)***
- ***Early release applications denied***
- ***Appeals fail to overturn "extremism" convictions***
- ***Russia plays up ties to Syrian Christians***
- ***2 and 6 years in prison for Valentina Baranovskaya (69) and her son Roman Baranovskiy (46)***
- ***Bagavudin Omarov sentenced to three years in prison and released***
- ***A Jehovah's Witness sentenced to 7 years 1/2 at the age of 63 years***
- ***Special Bimonthly FORB (01-15.02.2021)***

- ***The policy of expelling 'extremists and terrorists'***
  - ***Special Bimonthly FORB (17-31.01.2021)***
  - ***Special Bimonthly FORB (01-15.01.2021)***
  - ***Misuse of anti-extremism legislation***
  - ***New restrictions in the Russian religious law: What should believers expect?***
- 

## **Siberian Court Orders Falun Gong Movement Banned**

By Siberia Realities

Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty (11.11.2020) - <https://bit.ly/3edOX3m> - A Siberian regional court has banned Falun Gong, the Chinese spiritual movement that China's Communist Party has sought to stamp out since the late 1990s.

The ruling, by an appeals court in the city of Novosibirsk, was the latest in a number of court cases that have targeted not only Falun Gong, but other religious and spiritual organizations under Russia's strict extremism laws.

In July, the Supreme Court in the region of Khakasia, east of Novosibirsk, rejected local prosecutors' request to classify the Chinese movement as extremist, something that effectively shuts down an organization.

But on November 10, the Novosibirsk appeals court overruled the local court's decision.

A representative of the organization, Oskana Shchytokina, told RFE/RL that 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.

She said the two cases were used by prosecutors to file a request to classify the group as extremist.

"We consider the case fabricated and, of course, we will appeal the ruling, which will not affect activities of the movement's other branches [in Russia]," she said.

It's unclear what sort of legal consequences the Siberian court ruling will have beyond the region.

Since the 2016 passage of a measure known informally as Yarovaya's Law, Russian authorities have stepped up investigation and prosecution of some smaller religious groups.

Among those targeted most aggressively are the Jehovah's Witnesses, a denomination that was labeled an extremist group in 2017. Prosecutors have arrested and tried dozens of members since then.

Established in the early 1990s, Falun Gong is a spiritual teaching that combines meditation and traditional Chinese gymnastics with a moral philosophy.

The group, which has been dogged by accusations from former practitioners of a harsh, cult-like belief system, has been aggressively persecuted by the Chinese authorities. The group's world headquarters is currently in a town in upstate New York.

Photo: Members of Falun Gong hold slogans reading "Secede from the Communist Party" during a march in Taipei, Taiwan, in 2009. AP

---

## Special bimonthly FORB (16-30.06.2021)

### 30.06.21 - Two long-time Jehovah's Witnesses given harsh sentences

Full text only in Russian: <https://graniru.org/Society/Law/m.282071.html>

The city court of Blagoveshchensk of Amur oblast sentenced two Jehovah's Witnesses—30-year-old Dmitry Golik and 43-year-old Aleksei Berchuk—to seven and eight years of medium security imprisonment, Mediazona reports, citing the press service of the religious organization.

[Continue reading...](#)

### 30.06.21 - Moscow patriarchate against the union of Rome and Constantinople

Yesterday there was a meeting between the pope and the delegation of the ecumenical patriarch of Constantinople. The Russian Orthodox have always contested the primacy of Bartholomew. Kremlin: The West wants "Orthodox schism" and to impose a doctrine according to which "even Jesus Christ was a bisexual"

[Continue reading...](#)

### 27.06.21 - Ukrainian Baptist goes to Russia seeking converts

Link to full text in Russian: <https://www.kavkazr.com/a/31328599.html>

The May district court of Kabardino-Balkaria [Republic—K.B.R.] found a Ukrainian citizen, Pavel Gerashenko, guilty of illegal evangelism. The pastor was brought to administrative accountability on only the third attempt, since the administrative materials of the police lacked complete information about the violation.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **25.06.21 - Novokuznetsk: [RUSSIA](#): "Extremist organisations" suspended sentences and fines - list**

Courts have handed suspended sentences of between two and seven years on "extremism"-related charges to 70 Jehovah's Witnesses as a result of the 2017 Supreme Court ban on their activity. A Muslim who reads Said Nursi's works has completed a two-year suspended sentence. Courts have fined 11 Jehovah's Witnesses and two Muslims on the same "extremism"-related charges. While 29 Jehovah's Witnesses and 1 Muslim have been given jail terms, suspended sentences are now the most common form of punishment.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **24.06.21 - Evangelicals of south Russia face charges**

Link to full text in Russian: <https://www.kavkazr.com/a/31324318.html>

Four religious figures from [the republic of] Adygea have become subjects of administrative cases regarding missionary activity. This refers to pastors of several evangelical churches.

In Maikop, administrative materials have been collected with regard to Konsantin Loskutov, who, according to information from Kavkaz.Realii's source, is a pastor of the "Fellowship of Christian Businessmen."

[Continue reading...](#)

### **24.06.21 - Prosecutor demands harsh sentences for elderly Jehovah's Witness couple**

Link to full text in Russian: <https://cutt.ly/0mjmqaC>

On 23 June in the Metallurgical district court of Cheliabinsk, the prosecutor asked for seven years in prison for 75-year-old Jehovah's Witness Vladimir Suvorov. This is reported by the Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia portal.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **23.06.21 - Russia readies implementation of new law affecting religion**

Link to full text in Russian: <https://ria.ru/20210623/attestatsiya-1738289558.html>

Clergy who have received education abroad will be able to be recertified in Russia both in existing religious educational institutions and in special courses in secular educational institutions; the list of them may be drawn up by September, reported the chairman of the State Duma Committee on Development of Civil Society and Affairs of Public and Religious Associations, Sergei Gavrillov, at a press conference in the "Russia Today" International News Agency.

[Continue reading...](#)

---

## **Dmitry Golik and Aleksei Berchuk are Jehovah's Witnesses Nr 17 and 18 sentenced to prison in 2021**

HRWF (02.07.2021) – As of 1 July 2021, [JW.ORG](#) reported that 58 Jehovah's Witnesses were in pretrial detention or sentenced to prison; 33 were under house arrest; 234 criminal cases involving 503 believers have been under investigation. Since the 2017

Supreme Court ruling that liquidated the Witnesses' legal entities, 1,472 homes of Witnesses have been raided by the police.

### **Convicted, sentenced to prison in 2021**

10.02.2021: Aleksandr Ivshin, 7.5 years (prison, lost appeal)  
24.02.2021: Roman Baranovskiy, 6 years (prison, lost appeal)  
24.02.2021: Valentina Baranovskaya, 2 years (prison, lost appeal)  
29.03.2021: Viktor Stashevskiy, 6.5 years (pretrial facility, awaiting appeal)  
30.03.2021: Oleg Danilov, 3 years (prison, lost appeal)  
06.04.2021: Aleksandr Shcherbina, 3 years (pretrial facility, awaiting appeal)  
20.05.2021: Rustam Seidkuliev, 2.5 years (pretrial facility, awaiting appeal)  
28.05.2021: Anastasiya Polyakova 2.5 years - Gaukhar Bektemirova, 2 years and 3 months - Dinara Dyusekeyeva, 2 years.  
01.06.2021: Ekaterina Pegasheva, 6.5 years (prison)  
03.06.2021: Andrei Stupnikov, 6 years (prison)  
03.06.2021: Andrei Andreyev, Andrei Ryshkov, Armen Bagratyan, and Alevtina Bagratyan (from 2 to 4.5 years in prison)  
30.06.2021: Dmitri Golik (7 years) and Aleksei Berchuk (8 years)

### **Two long-time Jehovah's Witnesses given harsh sentences in Blagoveshchensk: seven and eight years**

Russia Religion News (30.06.2021) - <https://bit.ly/3juXCSj> - The city court of Blagoveshchensk of Amur oblast sentenced two Jehovah's Witnesses—30-year-old **Dmitry Golik** and 43-year-old **Aleksei Berchuk**—to seven and eight years of medium security imprisonment, Mediazona reports, citing the press service of the religious organization.

Berchuk was given the harshest punishment among all Jehovahists who have been convicted in Russia. The previous "record" belonged to 63-year-old Alexander Ivshin from the village of Kholmokaya of Abinsk district of Krasnodar territory, who was sentenced to 7.5 years in February.

Judge Tatiana Studilko issued the sentence. As the file on the case on the court's website makes clear, the believers were declared guilty on the basis of part 1 of article 282.2 of the Criminal Code (arranging the activity of an extremist organization). It is known that Golik also was charged on the basis of part 1.1 of article 282.1 (recruitment into the activity of an extremist organization).

The Jehovahists were given exactly the terms that the prosecutor requested.

Neither Berchuk nor Golik admitted guilt. In his final statement, Berchuk quoted the Bible, citing the example of the persecution of Christians in the Roman empire, the persecution of Orthodox believers in the U.S.S.R., and the persecution of Jehovahists in Nazi Germany. "My convictions are exclusively peaceful and therefore there are no victims or injured in the case. For me the demeaning of human dignity is unacceptable, undermining the foundations of the constitutional order and inciting religious or racial strife. And in the whole time of the judicial proceedings, the prosecution has not cited a single bit of evidence indicating otherwise!" he emphasized.

In turn, Golik declared that he does not "need any organization or legal entity in order to worship God," and he "opposes extremism or its manifestation and the very incitement of religious strife." "The truth is merely that I am a believer, that I am a Christian. And to be a Christian means to follow the footsteps of Christ, but where has this path led? Jesus

was sent to the stake of torment. Now I can be led to unreasonable punishment. And if that happens, it means that I am on the correct path," he said.

The F.S.B. conducted covert filming of Golik's life since back in October 2017. In June 2018, a senior investigator of the Amur U.F.S.B., I.A. Beloglazov, opened a case against Berchuk. On 20 July, searches were conducted in the homes of seven Jehovah's Witnesses in Blagoveshchensk. As was explained then, in the apartment where Golik and his wife lived, agents set up a wiretap. On the same day, Beloglazov opened a case against Golik and he was questioned as a defendant.

In January 2019, the charge was also announced against Berchuk. He was arrested in a Moscow airport while going through passport control. Beloglazov accompanied Berchuk to Blagoveshchensk and took from him a written pledge not to leave his place of residence.

In March 2020, the investigator for especially serious cases of the department of the Investigative Committee for Blagoveshchensk, M. V. Semeniak, issued a second charge for Golik: for the fact that he, as Jehovah's Witnesses affirm, discussed the Bible with a certain young person. The "victim" described in court how he liked to study the Bible with Golik and nobody forced him to become a Jehovah's Witness.

Berchuk is a native of the city of Kartaly of Cheliabinsk oblast; he later lived in Blagoveshchensk, Saransk, and other cities, and he read the Bible independently in the 1990s. He was employed in construction and finishing work. Golikov was born in the Buriat village of Tokhoi. He became interested in the Bible back in the 1990s. In his youth, he did alternative service instead of the army. He attended law school, but he did not work in the specialty; specifically, he worked as a translator of Chinese. Both believers are married. (tr. by PDS, posted 30 June 2021)

---

## **Special bimonthly FORB (01-15.06.2021)**

### **15.06.21 - One of convicted Jehovah's Witness, Artyom Bagratyan, was released after serving his entire sentence for faith**

Full text only in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/06/160838.html>

On June 15, 2021, Artyom Bagratyan left the pre-trial detention center and was released. About two weeks earlier, the Industrial District Court of Kursk sentenced the believer to 2.5 years in prison, but Artyom had already served this term while in custody.

**Continue reading...**

### **11.06.21 - Police raids Jehovah's Witnesses in Asha, Chelyabinsk Region**

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/06/111403.html>

On June 11, 2021, in the town of Asha, Chelyabinsk Region, several apartments of local believers were searched. After interrogations, the believers were released.

**Continue reading...**

### **10.06.21 - Novokuznetsk: Law enforcement officers search elderly people, suspecting them of worshipping Jehovah's God**

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/06/100823.html>

On June 8, 2021, in the city of Novokuznetsk law enforcement officers raided 3 houses of believing pensioners, as well as another apartment whose residents are not Jehovah's Witnesses.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **10.06.21 - Navalny backers see cautionary tale in Russian raids on Jehovah's Witnesses**

The decision by a Moscow court to declare Alexei Navalny's nationwide political organisation as "extremist" adds the group to a list associated with terrorist organisations such as al-Qaida and Islamic State.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **09.06.21 - RUSSIA: More jailed after "extremist organisation" trials - list**

As of 9 June, 20 Jehovah's Witnesses and 1 Muslim convicted on extremism-related criminal charges are in jail or in detention awaiting appeals. Another Jehovah's Witness is under house arrest and will be jailed if her appeal fails. Another Muslim who met with others to study Nursi's works is in detention awaiting deportation after serving his jail term. Twice as many prisoners of conscience are serving sentences or are in detention awaiting appeals for exercising freedom of religion or belief as in November 2020.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **07.06.21 - New searches of believers in the Khabarovsk Territory. Jehovah's Witness, 49, placed under house arrest after 2 days behind bars**

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/06/071554.html>

On June 5, 2021, searches took place in the working village of Solnechny (Khabarovsk Territory). A criminal case was initiated. 49-year-old Boris Yagovitev was detained and placed in a temporary detention facility.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **07.06.21 - RUSSIA: Oldest Jehovah's Witness – and first woman - jailed**

In July 2020, Valentina Baranovskaya suffered a stroke. In February 2021, Abakan City Court jailed the 70-year-old for two years to punish her for meeting fellow Jehovah's Witnesses for worship, a verdict her lawyer described as "devoid of all sympathy and compassion". Her son was jailed for six years. Baranovskaya is the oldest - and first female - Jehovah's Witness to be jailed since Russia banned all their activity. Two in their sixties - Yury Savelyov and Aleksandr Ivshin – are serving long jail terms.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **07.06.21 - Former Dachau Concentration Camp Inmates Call on Putin to Stop Persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia**

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/06/071504.html>

On May 16, 2021, the Lagergemeinschaft Dachau Association, founded by former prisoners of the Dachau concentration camp, sent an open letter to Russian President Vladimir Putin condemning the persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **05.06.21 - Museum of Christian Culture opens in St. Petersburg**

A testament to the liturgical history of the Orthodox Church down through the centuries. Artefacts of St Nicholas on loan from Bari Cathedral. The visual language of the icon is enhanced. Other "cultural mission" initiatives have been launched along the Golden Ring of the ancient Russian capitals.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **04.06.21 - Russian Church blessings for weapons**

Those used by Orthodox Christians "in the fulfilment of war duty". Some clergy also defend the blessing of nuclear weapons. Patriotic-military commitment is decisive in the tradition of Russian orthodoxy.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **04.06.21 - Jehovah's Witnesses detained in inhumane conditions**

Link to full text in Russian: <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/4847070>

A court in Kursk has completed consideration of a criminal case of extremism involving five adherents of the religious organization of Jehovah's Witnesses, which is forbidden in Russia. Four of them received real time in prison and one received a suspended sentence. Taking into account detention in a SIZO, at the present moment three men remain in custody. The convicts do not admit guilt and consider themselves to be victims of political repression.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **04.06.21 - In Komsomolsk-on-Amur, Nikolay Aliyev received 4.5 years of suspended sentence for his faith in God**

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/06/041326.html>

On June 4, 2021, the judge of the Central District Court of Komsomolsk-on-Amur, Natalya Gurkova, found Nikolay Aliyev, 42, guilty of involvement and participation in the activities of an extremist organization. He received a suspended sentence of 4 years and 6 months with restriction of freedom for 1 year and 2 months.



[Continue reading...](#)

**03.06.21 - In Kursk, a court sentenced five believers. Four of them, including a woman, were assigned from 2 to 4.5 years in prison**

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/06/031523.html>

On June 3, 2021, the Kursk Industrial District Court sentenced 5 Jehovah's Witnesses for their religion. Andrey Andreev was sentenced to 4.5 years in a colony, Andrey Ryshkov in the form of 3 years in a colony, Artem Bagratyan in the form of 2.5 years in a colony, his wife, Alevtina, in the form of 2 years in a colony.

[Continue reading...](#)

**02.06.21 - Number of Jehovah's Witnesses on trial in Lipetsk grows**

Link to full text in Russian: <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/4838718>

The directorate of the S.K.P. [Russian Investigative Committee] for Lipetsk oblast has opened a criminal case with respect to two organizers of a subdivision of the Jehovah's Witnesses (ruled in the R.F. to be extremist and forbidden). The agency noted that the subjects are suspected of arranging the activity of an extremist organization (part 1 of article 282.2 CC RF, up to ten years incarceration).

[Continue reading...](#)

**01.06.21 - Christian attorney gives advice for staying on good side of law**

Link to full text in Russian: [http://www.sclj.ru/news/detail.php?SECTION\\_ID=536&ELEMENT\\_ID=8370](http://www.sclj.ru/news/detail.php?SECTION_ID=536&ELEMENT_ID=8370)

The city of Ulianovsk is renown for the large number of cases connected with holding [persons] administratively accountable for so-called cases of illegal evangelism. I defended a church here for the first time in 2017, and we had to traverse the long path to the Supreme Court in order to prove our position of innocence and to get a decision of acquittal.

[Continue reading...](#)

**01.06.21 - The Court in Mari El sentenced Ekaterina Pegasheva to 6.5 years suspended for reading the Bible and talking about God**

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/06/011031.html>

On May 31, 2021, the judge of the Gornomariyskiy District Court of the Republic of Mari El, Nikolay Aiplatov, found 31-year-old Ekaterina Pegasheva guilty of extremism and sentenced her to 6 years and 6 months of probation with a probation period of 4 years.

[Continue reading...](#)

## More jailed after "extremist organisation" trials – list

***As of 9 June, 20 Jehovah's Witnesses and 1 Muslim convicted on extremism-related criminal charges are in jail or in detention awaiting appeals. Another Jehovah's Witness is under house arrest and will be jailed if her appeal fails. Another Muslim who met with others to study Nursi's works is in detention awaiting deportation after serving his jail term. Twice as many prisoners of conscience are serving sentences or are in detention awaiting appeals for exercising freedom of religion or belief as in November 2020.***

By Victoria Arnold

Forum 18 (09.06.2021) - <https://bit.ly/3vobujp> - Since November 2020, the number of Jehovah's Witnesses and Muslims convicted on extremism-related criminal charges and serving jail terms or awaiting appeals has almost doubled, from 11 to 21. Of these, 20 are Jehovah's Witnesses and one is a Muslim who met with others to study theologian Said Nursi's works. All were sentenced to terms in general-regime labour camps (ispravitelniye kolonii, "correctional colonies").

Another Muslim, Yevgeny Kim, who met others to study Nursi's writings was sentenced to three years and nine months' imprisonment in June 2017. In January 2019, he was stripped of his Russian citizenship, and was immediately placed in a detention centre for foreign and stateless persons upon his release in April 2019. He has remained there ever since, as his birthplace of Uzbekistan refuses to accept him (see full list of all 24 prisoners of conscience at the end of this article).

Another Muslim, Yevgeny Kim, who met others to study Nursi's writings was sentenced to three years and nine months' imprisonment in June 2017. In January 2019, he was stripped of his Russian citizenship, and was immediately placed in a detention centre for foreign and stateless persons upon his release in April 2019. He has remained there ever since, as his birthplace of Uzbekistan refuses to accept him (see full list of all 24 prisoners of conscience at the end of this article).

Among recent convictions, in February 2021, Abakan City Court [jailed 70-year-old Valentina Baranovskaya for two years](#) to punish her for meeting fellow Jehovah's Witnesses for worship, a verdict her lawyer described as "devoid of all sympathy and compassion". Her 46-year-old son Roman Baranovsky was jailed for six years. Baranovskaya is the oldest - and first female - Jehovah's Witness to be sentenced to imprisonment since the 2017 ban on Jehovah's Witness activity.

Recent convictions bring to 29 the number of Jehovah's Witnesses (and one Muslim who met others to read theologian Said Nursi's works) sentenced to imprisonment since May 2018 for exercising their right to freedom of religion and belief. All but one of the Jehovah's Witnesses were sentenced as a direct consequence of the Supreme Court's 2017 liquidation of the Jehovah's Witness Administrative Centre, and the consequent prohibition of Jehovah's Witness activities nationwide.

In November 2020, 8 Jehovah's Witnesses and one Muslim who met with others to study Nursi's works [were serving terms in general-regime labour camps, and another two Jehovah's Witnesses were detained awaiting appeal](#). Another Muslim who met other Muslims to study Nursi's writings had been stripped of his Russian citizenship, and was awaiting deportation in a detention centre for foreigners and stateless persons.

### **Currently serving prison terms or detained**

Of the 20 Jehovah's Witnesses (10 more than in November 2020) and two Muslim readers of Nursi's works currently on 9 June 2021 serving prison terms or in detention:

15 are already serving their terms in general-regime labour camps across the country, usually hundreds or even thousands of kilometres from their home regions;

6 are being held in detention centres while their appeals are pending; and 1 is awaiting deportation in a detention centre for foreigners and stateless persons.

One other Jehovah's Witness - Alevtina Bagratyan - remains under house arrest awaiting her appeal. The three Jehovah's Witnesses convicted with her in Kursk on 3 June are among the six being held in detention centres while their appeals are pending.

### **Deported, released**

Two Jehovah's Witnesses who were previously in prison have been released and deported from Russia to Uzbekistan and Ukraine. They were deprived of their Russian citizenship in 2020 as a direct result of their convictions.

Six of the 29 Jehovah's Witnesses convicted and jailed since May 2018 were released upon (or shortly after) conviction. This was because they had already served equivalent terms in detention while under investigation and on trial.

### **Over 470 under investigation, on trial, or convicted**

More than 470 Jehovah's Witnesses remain under investigation, are on trial, or have been convicted for continuing to meet for prayer and Bible study after the [2017 Supreme Court ban](#). They argue that the ban applies to the activities of the Administrative Centre and its subsidiary local congregations as legal entities, not to Jehovah's Witness beliefs or their expression by Jehovah's Witnesses.

No trials are currently underway of Muslims who met to study Nursi's works, but [three people are facing prosecution in the Tatarstan and Dagestan Republics](#).

A total of 104 people have now received sentences, including 10 fines, 66 suspended sentences (see forthcoming article), and 28 prison terms. Several court decisions have not yet come into force, as appeals are still pending.

Two other Jehovah's Witnesses have been convicted of "continuing the activities" of the local Jehovah's Witness religious organisation in Oryol, which was [liquidated as "extremist" in 2016](#), before the nationwide ban. One of them - [Danish citizen Dennis Christensen - has been imprisoned](#).

At present, only one Muslim who met with others to read Nursi's works remains imprisoned - Ilgar Vagif-ogly Aliyev (born 16 February 1977). A court in Dagestan sentenced him in May 2018 to [eight years' imprisonment plus two years of restrictions on freedom](#) for alleged involvement in "Nurdzhular".

Courts in Russia's illegally annexed territories of Crimea and Sevastopol have also [sentenced Jehovah's Witnesses and Muslims to imprisonment for exercising their freedom of religion and belief](#).

### **Acquitted, charges dropped**

In the last four years, only one Jehovah's Witness - Yury Zalipayev from the Republic of Kabardino-Balkariya - has been [acquitted of an extremism-related offence](#). His case was unconnected to the 2017 ban.

Charges against a further nine have been dropped. Eight of them were being prosecuted as a consequence of the 2017 ban, the other on unrelated "extremism" charges.

### ***Raids on Jehovah's Witness homes continue***

The Investigative Committee, police, the FSB security service, and National Guard troops continue to raid Jehovah's Witness homes. Some of the raids have included [torture, with no arrests or trials of suspect torturers](#). The most recent known raids were in Kemerovo Region on 8 June, Khabarovsk Region on 5 June, Lipetsk Region on 1 June, and Altay Region on 27 May. Prosecutions are currently underway in 64 of Russia's 83 federal subjects.

The United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention in May 2020 [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".

Muslims who meet to study the writings of Said Nursi may also be [prosecuted under the Extremism Law for organising or participating in the activities of "Nurdzhular"](#). This organisation was banned as extremist in 2008, but Muslims in Russia deny it ever existed. Typically, such Muslims meet in 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.

### ***Prosecutions***

Despite the [similarities in the manifestations of freedom of religion and belief being prosecuted, including meeting in each other's homes to pray and sing together, study sacred texts, and to discuss shared beliefs](#), trials have so far ended in a variety of sentences. These have ranged from prison terms of several years, to [suspended sentences of varying lengths, to a range of fines. one sentence of assigned labour, later changed to a fine.](#)

No one prosecuted in cases relating to the [2017 nationwide ban on Jehovah's Witnesses](#) 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.

List of those jailed or detained after "extremism"-related convictions for exercising freedom of religion or belief. Unless otherwise stated, all those named are Jehovah's Witnesses. Convictions have been under these [Criminal Code articles](#): 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"); Article 282.2 for "organising" (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 majority of convictions have been under this Article;

- Article 282.2, Part 1.1 ("Inclination, recruitment or other involvement of a person in an extremist organisation");
- and Article 282.3, Part 1 ("Financing extremist activity").

This list is broken down by category of punishment with regional headings referring 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 (Muslim - 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 Kemerovo Region Beryozovsky City Court 2 September 2020

2) Sergey Alekseyevich Britvin (born 18 August 1965) - [4 years](#)

3) Vadim Anatolyevich Levchuk (born 6 February 1972) - [4 years](#) Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 1 Appeal: unsuccessful - 19 January 2021, Kemerovo Regional Court Prison address: 630097, Novosibirskaya oblast, g. Novosibirsk, ul. Zvyozdnaya 34, FKU Ispravitel'naya koloniya No. 3 UFSIN Rossii po Novosibirskoy oblasti

- Khakasiya Republic

Abakan City Court 24 February 2021

4) Roman Lyubomirovich Baranovsky (born 27 June 1974) - [6 years](#)

5) Valentina Ivanovna Baranovskaya (born 8 April 1951)

- [2 years](#) Criminal Code Articles: 282.2, Part 1 and 282.2, Part 2 respectively Appeal: unsuccessful - 24 May 2021, Supreme Court of the Khakassiya Republic Detention centre address: 655017, Respublika Khakasiya, g. Abakan, kv. Molodyozhniy 22B, FKU Sledstvenniy izolyator No. 1 UFSIN Rossii po Respublike Khakasiya

Krasnodar Region Abinsk District Court, Abinsk 10 February 2021

6) Aleksandr Yevgenyevich Ivshin (born 21 August 1957) - [7 years and 6 months, plus destruction of Bible](#) (in an edition not banned as "extremist") Criminal Code Article: 282.2, Part

1 Appeal: unsuccessful - 15 April 2021, Krasnodar Regional Court Prison address: from 1 June 2021 - 390013, Ryazanskaya oblast, g. Ryazan, Pervomaysky prospekt 27b, FKU Sledstvenniy izolyator No. 1 UFSIN Rossii po Ryazanskoy oblasti

(This is Ivshin's seventh place of detention since his conviction - one in Novorossiysk in his home region of Krasnodar; one each in Rostov-on-Don, Volgograd, and Saratov; two in Samara Region; and now one in Ryazan. It remains unknown where he will serve his sentence.) Abinsk District Court 30 March 2021

7) Oleg Ivanovich Danilov (born 22 April 1974) - 3 years Criminal Code Article: 2 82.2, Part 2 Appeal: unsuccessful - 25 May 2021, Krasnodar Regional Court Prison address: 352680, Krasnodarskiy kray, Apsheronskiy rayon, g. Khadyzhensk, ul. Griboyedova 42, FKU Ispravitel'naya koloniya No. 9 UFSIN Rossii po Krasnodarskomu krayu -

Novosibirsk Region Lenin District Court, Novosibirsk 16 December 2020

8) Yury Prokopyevich Savelyov (born 1 January 1954) - [6 years](#) Criminal Code Article: 282.2, Part 1 Appeal: unsuccessful - 5 April 2021, Novosibirsk Regional Court Prison address: 658209, Altayskiy kray, g. Rubtsovsk, ul. Traktornaya 23, FKU Ispravitel'naya koloniya No. 5 UFSIN Rossii po Altayskomu krayu Omsk Region Pervomayskiy District Court, Omsk 30 November 2020

9) Sergey Valyeryevich Polyakov (born 28 April 1972) - [3 years](#) Criminal Code Articles: 282.2, Part 1 and 282.3 Part 1 Appeal: unsuccessful - 28 May 2021, Omsk Regional Court Detention centre address: 644007, Omskaya oblast, g. Omsk, ul. Ordzhonikidze 86, FKU Sledstvenniy izolyator No. 1 UFSIN Rossii po Omskoy oblasti Three fellow defendants were tried under Criminal Code Article 282.2 Part 2 and [given two-year suspended sentences](#). Oryol Region Railway District Court, Oryol 6 February 2019

10) 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 26 October 2020 (this decision was upheld at Kursk Regional Court on 10 February 2021)- Saratov Region Lenin District Court,

Saratov

19 September 2019

11) Aleksey Vladimirovich Budenchuk (born 27 July 1982) - [3 years and 6 months](#)

12) Gennady Vasilyevich German (born 12 June 1969) - [2 years and 6 months](#)

13) Roman Aleksandrovich Gridasov (16 September 1978) - [2 years and 6 months](#)

14) Aleksey Petrovich Miretsky (born 14 December 1975) - [2 years and 6 months](#)

All four also [have 1 year's restrictions on freedom + 5-year ban on holding leadership positions in any public organisation](#). They were convicted alongside Konstantin Bazhenov and Feliks Makhammadiyev, who have since been released [and deported](#). Some of the six [have been tortured. No suspect torturer is known to have been arrested or put on criminal trial](#). Criminal Code Article: 282.2, Part 1 Appeal: unsuccessful 20 December 2019, Saratov Regional Court Prison address: 460026, g. Orenburg, Krymsky pereulok 119, FKU Ispravitelnaya koloniya No. 1 UFSIN Rossii po Orenburgskoy oblasti Gridasov, Miretsky, German, and Budenchuk applied [for early release and the replacement of their remaining terms with fines](#). Central District Court in Orenburg refused all four requests (Gridasov on 10 December 2020 (unsuccessful appeal on 24 February 2021), Miretsky on 15 December 2020 (unsuccessful appeal on 26 February 2021), German on 18 January 2021, Budenchuk on 19 February 2021). (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 15) 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 OR UNDER HOUSE ARREST AWAITING APPEAL**

- Krasnodar Region Abinsk District Court 6 April 2021 1) Aleksandr Anatolyevich Shcherbina (born 11 March 1976) - 3 years Criminal Code Article: 282.2, Part 2 Appeal: due on 16 June 2021 at Krasnodar Regional Court Detention centre address: 353905, Krasnodarskiy kray, g. Novorossiysk, ul. Parkhomenko 33, FKU Sledstvenniy izolyator No. 3 UFSIN Rossii po Krasnodarskomu krayu Krasnoyarsk Region Railway District Court,



Krasnoyarsk 3 June 2021 2) Andrey Garafetanovich Stupnikov (born 17 September 1973) - 6 years Criminal Code Article: 282.2, Part 1 Appeal: unknown Detention centre address: 660075, Krasnoyarskiy kray, g. Krasnoyarsk, ul. Respubliki 72, FKU Sledstvenniy izolyator No. 1 UFSIN Rossii po Krasnoyarskomu krayu Kursk Region Promyshlenny District Court, Kursk 3 June 2021 3) Andrey Leonidovich Andreyev (born 12 October 1976) - 4 years and 6 months; Criminal Code: Article 282.2, Part 1

4) Andrey Vladimirovich Ryshkov (born 6 May 1987) - 3 years;

5) Artyom Babkenovich Bagratyan (born 9 May 1972) - 2 years and 6 months;

6) Alevtina Mikhailovna Bagratyan (born 25 July 1977) - 2 years; Criminal Code Article: 282.2, Part 2 Tried alongside Aleksandr Vospitanyuk, who received a two-year suspended sentence Appeal: unknown Detention centre address: 305016, Kurskaya oblast, g. Kursk, ul. Pirogova 1, FKU Sledstvenniy izolyator No. 1 UFSIN Rossii po Kurskoy oblasti (for Andreyev, Ryshkov, and Artyom Bagratyan).

Alevtina Bagratyan will remain under house arrest until the ruling comes into force.

Saratov Region Lenin District Court, Saratov 20 May 2021

7) Rustam Atayevich Seidkuliyeu (born 17 July 1977) - 2 years and 6 months, plus 1 year of restrictions on freedom Criminal Code Article: 282.2, Part 2 Appeal: unknown Detention centre address: unknown

### ***DETAINED AWAITING POSSIBLE DEPORTATION***

- Khabarovsk Region Blagoveshchensk City Court 19 June 2017

1) Yevgeny Lvovich Kim (Muslim - 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 soderzhaniya inostrannikh grazhdan

On 28 October 2020, Kim [applied unsuccessfully for cancellation of his criminal record](#) (snyatiye sudimosti). On 10 November 2020, the Institute for 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. This was also unsuccessful.

### ***SENTENCED TO IMPRISONMENT BUT RELEASED BECAUSE OF TIME IN DETENTION***

-

Bryansk Region Novozybkov City Court 3 September 2020

1) Vladimir Aleksandrovich Khokhlov (born 9 April 1977) - [1 year and 3 months'](#); [1 year's restrictions on freedom](#)

2) Tatyana Viktorovna Shamsheva (born 7 June 1977) - [1 year; 6 months' restrictions on freedom](#)

3) Olga Sergeyevna Silayeva (born 11 May 1988) - [1 year; 6 months' restrictions on freedom](#)

4) Eduard Vladimirovich Zhinzhikov (born 9 November 1971) - [1 year and 3 months; 1 year's restrictions on freedom](#) Criminal Code Articles: 282.2, Part 1, 282.3 Part 1 (Khokhlov and Zhinzhikov); 282.2, Part 2 (Shamsheva and Silayeva) Appeal: unsuccessful - 28 October 2020, Bryansk Regional Court

None of the four has been imprisoned, as the two women had already served 245 days and the two men 316 days in detention before conviction. They did, however, remain subject to the restrictions on freedom imposed by the judge.

-Krasnodar Region Khostinsky District Court, Sochi 18 December 2020

5) Nikolay Nikolayevich Kuzichkin (born 28 February 1951) - 1 year and 1 month;

6) Vyacheslav Alekseyevich Popov (born 19 September 1974) - 1 year and 10 months Criminal Code Article: 282.2, Part 1 Appeal: none Kuzichkin was released from the courtroom, as he had already served 197 days in detention and 240 days under house arrest. Popov remained in detention for another 11 days after conviction, by which time he had spent a total of 446 days in detention.

### **DEPORTED FOLLOWING IMPRISONMENT**

-Saratov Region Lenin District Court, Saratov 19 September 2019

1) Konstantin Viktorovich Bazhenov (born 10 May 1975) - [3 years and 6 months](#)

2) Feliks Khasanovich Makhammadiyev (born 14 December 1984) – [3 years](#) Criminal Code Article: 282.2, Part 1 Appeal: unsuccessful - 20 December 2019, Saratov Regional Court Tried alongside Aleksey Budenchuk, Gennady German, Roman Gridasov, and Aleksey Miretsky. Bazhenov was released early from Labour Camp No. 3 in Dmitrovgrad (Ulyanovsk Region) on 5 May 2021 and [sent to a migration detention centre - deported to Ukraine on 19 May 2021](#). (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](#).)

Makhammadiyev was released from Labour Camp No. 1 in Orenburg on 31 December 2020 at the end of his sentence and [sent to a migration detention centre - deported to Uzbekistan on 21 January 2021](#).

Photo : Yevgeny Kim Copyright Memorial – Forum 18

---

## **16 Jehovah's Witnesses sentenced to prison terms since 1 January and behind bars**

### ***Six more Jehovah's Witnesses already sentenced to heavy prison terms in June***

HRWF (04.06.2021) – As of 17 May 2021, [JW.ORG](#) reported that 59 Jehovah's Witnesses were in pretrial detention or sentenced to prison, 34 were under house arrest, 214 were restricted from travelling and 419 more cases were under investigation but six more Jehovah's Witnesses were already sentenced to heavy prison terms on 1 and 3 June.

### ***Convicted, sentenced to prison in 2021***



10.02.2021: Aleksandr Ivshin, 7.5 years (prison, lost appeal)  
24.02.2021: Roman Baranovskiy, 6 years (prison, lost appeal)  
24.02.2021: Valentina Baranovskaya, 2 years (prison, lost appeal)  
29.03.2021: Viktor Stashevskiy, 6.5 years (pretrial facility, awaiting appeal)  
30.03.2021: Oleg Danilov, 3 years (prison, lost appeal)  
06.04.2021: Aleksandr Shcherbina, 3 years (pretrial facility, awaiting appeal)  
20.05.2021: Rustam Seidkuliev, 2.5 years (pretrial facility, awaiting appeal)  
28.05.2021: Anastasiya Polyakova 2.5 years - Gaukhar Bektemirova, 2 years and 3 months - Dinara Dyusekeyeva, 2 years.  
01.06.2021: Ekaterina Pegasheva, 6.5 years (prison)  
03.06.2021: Andrei Stupnikov, 6 years (prison)  
03.06.2021: Andrei Andreyev, Andrei Ryshkov, Armen Bagratyan, and Alevtina Bagratyan (from 2 to 4.5 years in prison)

### **1 June: Russian Jehovah's Witness found guilty of 'extremism'**

By RFE/RL's Tatar-Bashkir Service

RFE/ RL (01.06.2021) - <https://bit.ly/3z1Y1AP> - A Jehovah's Witness in the western Russian republic of Mari El has been found guilty of extremism and given a suspended 6 1/2 year prison sentence.

**Ekaterina Pegasheva**, who was convicted by the Gornomariskiy district court on June 1, denied the charge and vowed to appeal the ruling.

"The only victims in this criminal case are me, my mother, [and] my elderly sick bedridden grandmother. We have suffered significant damage -- property, physical, emotional, mental, as well as damage to our reputation," Pegasheva told the court before the verdict was issued.

"I am a law-abiding citizen of the Russian Federation. I did not call for violence. My conscience is clear before God, before the state, and before the people."

Jehovah's Witnesses is a Christian denomination with an estimated 175,000 followers in Russia. In 2017, Russia's Supreme Court declared the group an extremist organization.

Since then, Russian law enforcement has raided the homes of more than 1,300 worshippers and over 400 have been either charged or convicted of extremism in a brutal crackdown that has swept up followers aged 19 to 90.

The European Association of Jehovah's Witnesses estimates that between 5,000 to 10,000 of its members have fled Russia since the ban came into force.

The case against Pegasheva was opened in September 2019. According to the authorities, Pegasheva continued to preach her brand of Christianity despite the ban on the Jehovah's Witnesses.

In October 2019, police searched her home in Yoshkar-Ola, seizing books, videos, electronic devices, personal letters, and other documents. Her mother's home in Pirogovo, in the Kirov region, was also searched.

Pegasheva was held for more than four months in pretrial detention before spending more than a year under house arrest.

### **3 June: Russia's crackdown on Jehovah's Witnesses continues, with at least seven more sentenced**

RFE/ RL (03.06.2021) - <https://bit.ly/3vQ4NrD> - At least seven Jehovah's Witnesses have been handed prison terms in Russia amid a continuing crackdown on the religious group, which was banned in the country in 2017.

Representatives of Jehovah's Witnesses [informed RFE/RL](#) that a court in Russia's Siberian city of Krasnoyarsk sentenced **Andrei Stupnikov** to six years in prison on June 3 after finding him guilty of the organization of activities of an extremist organization.

Stupnikov was arrested three years ago. He was initially kept in a detention center and later transferred to house arrest.

Stupnikov rejected the charge, insisting that the case against him was launched because of his religious views.

According to the religious group, a court in Russia's western city of Kursk on June 3 sentenced four other members -- **Andrei Andreyev, Andrei Ryshkov, Armen Bagratyan, and Alevtina Bagratyan** -- to prison terms of between two years and 4 1/2 years. One more follower of the faith, Aleksandr Vospitanyuk, received a suspended sentence. All five were found guilty of organizing or taking part in the activities of an extremist group.

A day earlier, a court in the Siberian city of Minusinsk fined Dmitry Maslov 450,000 rubles (\$6,100) for taking part in the activities of the Jehovah's Witnesses, while a court in the Far Eastern city of Zeya handed a suspended two-year prison term to 78-year-old Vasily Reznichenko on the same charge.

---

## **Special bimonthly FORB (16-31.05.2021)**

### **31.05.21 - Shi'ism in Russia**

Full text only in Russian: Шиизм в современной России

[Continue reading...](#)

### **26.05.21 - An appeal in Krasnodar upheld the sentence to Oleg Danilov - 3 years in prison for faith**

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/05/260931.html>

On May 25, 2021, the Krasnodar Regional Court upheld the conviction against 47-year-old Jehovah's Witness Oleg Danilov from the village of Kholm'skaya. For discussing the Bible, he was sentenced to 3 years in prison with restriction of freedom for a period of 1 year.

[Continue reading...](#)

#### **26.05.21 - Five Jehovah's Witnesses from Moscow suburbs sentenced to suspended terms.**

Link to full text in Russian: <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=77314>

A court in the Moscow region sentenced adherents of the Jehovah's Witnesses organization (which is forbidden in the R.F.) to suspended prison terms for participating in its activity, reported a representative of the oblast headquarters of the Investigative Committee (S.K.R.), Olga Vrad'y.

[Continue reading...](#)

#### **24.05.21 - In Chekhov, the Court gave four believers from two to six years probation for discussing the Bible**

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/05/241938.html>

On May 24, 2021, the judge of the Chekhov City Court of the Moscow Region, Irina Pantela, found four local Jehovah's Witnesses guilty of extremism and assigned them a suspended sentence: Yuriy Krutyakov - 6 years with a probation period of 5 years; Zinaida Krutyakova - 2 years and 3 months with a probationary period of 2 years, Konstantin Zherebtsov - 2 years and 2 months with a probationary period of 2 years, Vitaliy Nikiforov - 2 years with the same probationary period.

[Continue reading...](#)

#### **25.05.21 - Khakassia supreme court confirms prison colony for 70-year-old woman because of her faith.**

Link to full text in Russian: <http://www.comcb.info/material.php?id=60ACA96B65FF7>

The Supreme Court of the republic of Khakassia refused to grant Valentina and Roman Baranovsky their appeals against an unprecedentedly harsh sentence: incarceration for a woman Jehovah's Witnesses who is 70 years old; her son received six years in a penal colony. This was reported on 25 May to Kasparov.ru by the European Association of Jehovah's Witnesses.

[Continue reading...](#)

#### **25.05.21 - Moscow, Orthodox feast of Cyril and Methodius: the Cyrillic alphabet and the cultural mission**

The two evangelizers, celebrated yesterday, used a "Christian alphabet" to unite different peoples, overcoming the prejudice between "Greeks" and "barbarians". President Vladimir Putin Best sends best wishes to Patriarch Kirill.

[Continue reading...](#)

**21.05.21 - 54-year-old Vitaliy Popov received 3 years of suspended sentence.**

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/05/211336.html>

On May 21, 2021, Natalya Devyatko, a judge of the Lenin District Court of Novosibirsk, found Vitaliy Popov guilty under Part 2 of Art. 282.2 and part 1 of Art. 282.3 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation (participation and financing of the activities of an extremist organization). He was sentenced to 3 years of suspended sentence.

[Continue reading...](#)

**21.05.21 - Cassation court in Piatigorsk finally acquits Jehovah's witness Yury Zalipaev**

Link to full text in Russian: <https://www.jw-russia.org/news/2021/05/210937.html>

On 20 May 2021, in Piatigorsk, the Fifth cassation court of general jurisdiction finally confirmed the innocence of a Jehovah's Witness from the city of Maisky, Yury Zalipaev. A panel of three judges under the presidency of Sergei Leontiev, with judges Svetlana Kharrasova and Andrei Zhelezny, completely refused the prosecutor's cassation representation against the verdict of acquittal.

[Continue reading...](#)

**21.05.21 - Evangelicals unable to make away Anglican Church from 'Music Hall'**

Link to full text in Russian: <https://abnews.ru/2021/05/21/evangelisty-ne-smogli-otnyat-u-myuzik-holla-anglikanskuyu-czerkov/>

Smolny [i.e. St. Petersburg city hall—tr.] decided to leave the premises of the former Anglican church on Galernaia Street in the ownership of "Music Hall."

The "Hosanna" Evangelical Christian Church sent to the government of St. Petersburg a request to transfer into its possession the complex of buildings that at the present time is occupied by the "Music Hall" theatre. The request appeared on the website of the Committee on Property Relations on 27 April 2021.

[Continue reading...](#)

**20.05.21 - Elderly, infirm woman convicted on extremism charges in Russia for being a Jehovah's Witness**

A 73-year-old Jehovah's Witness in Russia's Far Eastern Primorye region has been handed a four-year suspended sentence on extremism charges amid an ongoing crackdown on the religious group that has been banned in the country since 2017.

[Continue reading...](#)

**20.05.21 - Another Muslim activist arrested**

Link to full text in Russian: <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=77285>

The activity of adherents of an international religious association promoting extremist ideology has been terminated in Saratov oblast, the press service of the investigation department of the S.K.R. [Investigative Committee of Russia] for the region reports.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **19.05.21 - Four Jehovah's Witnesses in Cheliabinsk face trial**

Link to full text in Russian: <https://www.jw-russia.org/news/2021/05/191928.html>

On 18 May 2021, security forces conducted a search in the home of 44-year-old Pavel Popov from Emanzhelinsk, a city approximately 40 kilometers from Cheliabinsk. The believer was arrested, but later he was released on his own recognizance. A criminal case was opened based on part 1 of article 282.2 of the Criminal Code of the R.F. (arranging extremist activity).

[Continue reading...](#)

### **18.05.21 - A Court in Rostov-on-Don sentenced a 71-year-old woman to two years of suspended imprisonment for believing in Jehovah's God**

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/05/181732.html>

On May 18, 2021 the judge of Leninsky district court of Rostov-on-Don Alexander Osipov found Lyudmila Ponomarenko guilty of participation in extremist activity - this is how the court interpreted her religious beliefs. The believer was sentenced to 2 years of suspended imprisonment—the exact amount the prosecutor asked.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **18.05.21 - Another Jehovah's Witness added to Rostov's total of convicts**

Link to full text in Russian: <https://www.kavkaz-uzel.media/articles/364028/>

Today a court in Rostov-on-Don found the Jehovah's Witness Liudmila Ponomarenko guilty of participating in an extremist organization and sentenced her to a suspended term of two years imprisonment.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **18.05.21 - Russian customs seizes Jehovah's Witnesses literature**

Link to full text in Russian: <https://www.hibiny.com/news/archive/238778/>

Agents of Murmansk customs and the border control of the Russian F.S.B. for the western arctic district discovered on a boat printed material that is forbidden for import.

[Continue reading...](#)

## 17.05.21 - [RUSSIA](#): Widened ban on "extremists" exercising religious freedom

Religion Law amendments – which come into force in October – ban those the state considers – rightly or wrongly – to be extremists from participating in religious groups. They also ban commercial entities (such as bookshops) from including a religious affiliation in their name unless they were founded by a centralised religious organisation (or, for NGOs, get their approval).

[Continue reading...](#)

---

## Widened ban on "extremists" exercising religious freedom

***Religion Law amendments – which come into force in October – ban those the state considers – rightly or wrongly – to be extremists from participating in religious groups. They also ban commercial entities (such as bookshops) from including a religious affiliation in their name unless they were founded by a centralised religious organisation (or, for NGOs, get their approval). Olga Sibiriyova of the Moscow-based SOVA Center warns that "the wording of the amendments is very imprecise and leaves room for interpretation" by police and prosecutors.***

By Victoria Arnold

Forum 18 (17.05.2021) - <https://bit.ly/3fuCV6w> - The latest amendments to the Religion Law, signed by President Vladimir Putin on 5 April, will bar those the state considers – rightly or wrongly – to be extremists from participation in religious groups. Such people are already banned from participation in registered religious organisations.

Religious groups can be either independent or affiliated to centralised religious organisations. In neither case is the religious group a legal entity.

Those banned from leading or participating in religious groups could include individual Muslims who meet to study the works of Said Nursi, individual Jehovah's Witnesses, and individuals associated with the Crimean Tatar Mejlis, if these people have been convicted under the Extremism Law or have been added to the Federal Financial Monitoring Service (Rosfinmonitoring) "List of Terrorists and Extremists" (see below).

It appears likely that opposition politician Aleksey Navalny's Anti-Corruption Foundation (FBK), Citizens' Rights Defence Foundation (FZPG), and regional headquarters will also soon be declared "extremist" organisations, as might the All-Tatar Public Centre, a cultural organisation based in Tatarstan's capital Kazan. Individuals associated with such organisations and subsequently convicted of extremism-related offences or placed on the Rosfinmonitoring List would also be banned from participating in religious groups, as well as religious organisations (see below).

The Religion Law amendments – which come into force on 3 October 2021 – also ban legal entities from including a religious affiliation in their name unless they were founded by or get the approval of a centralised religious organisation. This would affect a company wanting to set up an Islamic or Christian book shop, for example, or a non-governmental organisation, such as an Islamic or Christian human rights group (see below).

Religious groups will also be obliged to submit information on their composition and activities to the Justice Ministry once a year, rather than every three years (see below).

Another major change introduced by the amendments will be a requirement for clergy, religious teachers, and missionaries who have received professional training abroad to undergo a course in "state-confessional relations in the Russian Federation", and to be re-certified by a centralised religious organisation, before they can begin working in Russia. How this will be implemented remains unclear, as few religious educational institutions appear to be eligible to offer such courses, no list of secular providers has yet been published, and the course content, costs, and format are not yet known.

"The main problem is that the wording of the amendments is very imprecise and leaves room for interpretation," Olga Sibiryova of the Moscow-based SOVA Center told Forum 18. "Therefore, much will depend on how the new rules will be interpreted in the course of law enforcement practice" (see below).

It is so far unknown what punishment – if any – individuals or organisations might face for violating the provisions of the new amendments once they come into force in October.

The Duma may make corresponding changes to the Administrative Code in order to introduce explicit penalties for non-compliance, though there has been no indication as yet of if or when this will take place.

Lawyer Konstantin Andreyev thinks that specific administrative penalties will be introduced, although lawyer Vasily Nichik of the Seventh-day Adventist Church points out that this is not obligatory, and prosecutors could use the existing Article 19.7 ("Failure to provide information"), Article 19.4 ("Disobedience to a lawful order by an official of a state or municipal supervisory body"), and Article 19.5, Part 1 ("Failure to comply within the prescribed period with a legal order on the elimination of legal violations, issued by a body exercising state supervision").

The various Parts of these Articles carry penalties ranging from a few hundred Roubles for private individuals, to a few thousand for people in an official role, to tens of thousands for legal entities.

It is also unknown how the authorities might enforce compliance with the new amendments.

The Religion Law amendments, introduced by the Justice Ministry and overseen by the State Duma's Committee for the Development of Civil Society and Issues of Public and Religious Associations, are "aimed at increasing the transparency of religious associations' activities and increasing the efficiency of the justice authorities' exercise of their powers of state supervision over the activities of religious associations", according to the Committee's conclusions of 16 September 2020.

### ***"Replete with vague wording"***

Despite later alterations to these Religion Law amendments which have gone some way towards easing and clarifying the requirements, there are still outstanding problems and unanswered questions, the burden of which is likely to fall principally on religious communities themselves.

The amendments remain "replete with vague wording", lawyer Stanislav Kulov commented to Forum 18 on 24 March. They may be "safely viewed as unjustified



interference in the activities of religious associations by the state and an encroachment on the constitutionally enshrined principle of separating religious associations from the state".

"We will comply with the law as much as possible, but some articles of the law are vague," Pentecostal Bishop Sergey Ryakhovsky commented to RIA Novosti on 8 April 2021. "We hope that all these points will be regulated with by-laws. It is also important that the authorities consult with representatives of [religious organisations] when creating by-laws."

"The main problem is that the wording of the amendments is very imprecise and leaves room for interpretation. Therefore, much will depend on how the new rules will be interpreted in the course of law enforcement practice," Olga Sibiryova of the SOVA Center told Forum 18 on 14 May. "It is impossible to predict this in detail now, but given the experience of the application of the 'anti-missionary' amendments, it can be assumed that not all the [legal] formulations will be interpreted in believers' favour."

Commenting on the "ever wider scope for a new stage of lawlessness" created by the amendments, Seventh-day Adventist lawyer Vasily Nichik drew comparisons with the 2016 anti-missionary amendments, whose imprecise definitions have permitted police and prosecutors to bring many prosecutions.

"[We could be fined] on the basis on which we experienced the first wave of fines for 'unlawful missionary activity'," Nichik wrote on Facebook on 23 March, "when we were fined for unmarked books in the cupboard, for a sign replaced by police, for not being able to read the sign from the street from a distance of 20 metres, for the gift of a New Testament, for the fact that the preacher in the pulpit was not authorised [to perform] missionary activity, for the fact that greetings were relayed from another city at a worship service .. the list can go on and on. And all this was portrayed in police reports as countering terrorism and extremism".

### ***"The protection of our state from external interference"***

Some amendments are also ostensibly motivated by the government's desire to combat the influence of "extremist" religious beliefs.

The State Duma's Committee for the Development of Civil Society and Issues of Public and Religious Associations said in a press release on 5 April that the law "is directed at strengthening the spiritual sovereignty of Russia".

Sergey Gavrilov, head of the Committee, stated: "The ban on leadership of and participation in religious groups of persons connected to extremist activities, as well as the financing of terrorism, is dictated by the need to ensure the protection of our state from external interference."

Neither strengthening "spiritual sovereignty" nor protection from "external interference" are permissible reasons to restrict freedom of religion and belief under Russia's legally-binding international human rights obligations.

Forum 18 wrote to the Duma's Committee for the Development of Civil Society and Issues of Public and Religious Associations before the start of the working day on 11 May, asking why the amendments had been introduced for reasons which are not permitted under Russia's legally binding international human rights obligations. Forum 18 also asked how the amendments are expected to protect citizens from extremism. Forum 18 received no reply as of the end of the working day on 17 May.



"Perhaps [legislators] really do see potential extremists in all religious associations, except for the Russian Orthodox Church. Perhaps, given the general 'tightening of the screws', it seems that it is impossible to leave any part of public life uncontrolled," Olga Sibiryova of the SOVA Center commented to Forum 18 on 14 May.

"In addition," Sibiryova added, "the level of literacy in the field of religion among representatives of the authorities, unfortunately, is low, and xenophobia is inherent in them as well as in society as a whole – that is, they really could consider most religious associations to be dangerous 'sects'."

### ***Bans on range of individuals in religious groups as well as organisations***

The Religion Law amendments will ban the following categories of people from being leaders of or participants in religious groups:

- those whose names have been added to the Rosfinmonitoring "List of Terrorists and Extremists";
- those "whose actions contain signs of extremist activity, as established by a court decision which has entered legal force";
- foreign and stateless persons whose presence in Russia has been deemed "undesirable";
- people whose assets have been frozen by the Interdepartmental Commission on Countering the Financing of Terrorism.

The same categories of people are already barred from leadership of and participation in registered religious organisations, Russia's other form of legally recognised religious association.

Religious communities also exist which have neither registered as organisations nor submitted notification of their existence as religious groups, such as Council of Churches Baptists. Their members risk prosecution for all exercise of the right to freedom of religion or belief.

The ban "directly contradicts" such individuals' constitutional right to practise their religion together with others, according to Olga Sibiryova's 29 April religious freedom report for the SOVA Center for Information and Analysis.

The amendments do not conform to the Constitution, Aleksandr Verkhovsky of the SOVA Center told Forum 18 on 7 May. "The state should not interfere in the internal life of religious associations, and that is exactly what this is."

As of 17 May, 10,859 individuals were on the Rosfinmonitoring "List of Terrorists and Extremists". These include terrorists such as the one survivor convicted of participating in the Beslan school siege in 2004. However, others included on the List as "extremists" are Jehovah's Witnesses and Muslim readers of Nursi's works.

Individuals are included on the Rosfinmonitoring List at the behest of investigators or prosecutors. Banks are obliged to freeze an individual's assets, blocking all but small transactions (up to 10,000 Roubles). Being added to the List leads to a variety of problems in everyday life, including being unable to receive salaries, pensions, or benefits, renew insurance policies, or even purchase a phone SIM card.

Inclusion on the Rosfinmonitoring List usually takes place before a criminal case comes to trial, sometimes even before an indictment is issued, meaning that an individual may be

added to the List – and thereby barred from participation in religious groups (and organisations) – without having been convicted of or even charged with any offence. If a person is acquitted or the case against them halted, it may also take a long time for them to be removed from the List.

Most of the entities on the Justice Ministry's list of public associations and religious organisations banned under the Extremism Law do violate the human rights of others. Such entities include far-right and Islamist groups, violent football hooligans, and organised criminal gangs.

There are also, however, both religious and non-religious organisations on the list which do not violate human rights. These include:

- Jehovah's Witnesses, over 450 of whom are under criminal investigation, are on trial, or have been convicted under the Extremism Law for "continuing the activities" of their banned organisation;
- "Nurdzhular", an alleged association of Muslims who meet to study the writings of Turkish theologian Said Nursi. Muslims in Russia deny the association exists, and, like Jehovah's Witnesses, its alleged members are also subject to prosecution for "continuing the activities" of their banned organisation;
- the Khakassiya Republic's regional branch of the Chinese spiritual movement Falun Gong.

It appears likely that opposition politician Aleksey Navalny's Anti-Corruption Foundation (FBK), Citizens' Rights Defence Foundation (FZPG), and regional headquarters will also soon be declared "extremist" organisations, as might the All-Tatar Public Centre, a cultural organisation based in Tatarstan's capital Kazan. If this happens, individuals associated with these organisations and convicted under the Extremism Law or added to the Rosfinmonitoring List would be barred from participating in religious groups (and organisations).

The Crimean Tatars' highest representative body, the Mejlis, was also banned and added to the List after Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea.

Jehovah's Witnesses and Muslims who meet to study Nursi's works are already subject to criminal prosecution if investigators think they are "continuing the activities" of their banned organisations. The ban on participation in religious groups (and religious organisations) means that they may also risk problems with the police and possible administrative prosecution if they decide to join other religious communities.

Among the people currently facing prosecution for Jehovah's Witness activities, for instance, is at least one person who is no longer a Jehovah's Witness - Vyacheslav Ivanovich Osipov, on trial in Volgograd – and one person who has never been a Jehovah's Witness - Ruslan Garaftinovich Zalyayev, under investigation in Karpinsk, Sverdlovsk Region.

### ***Who is and is not a "participant"?***

Exactly to whom the ban on participation applies and how it will be enforced is unclear. The Religion Law contains no explicit definition of a "participant" in a religious group (or organisation).

Group leaders (or the centralised religious organisations with which they are affiliated) are obliged to submit information about the "citizens, belonging to the religious group" (svedeniya o grazhdanakh, vkhodyashchikh v religioznuyu gruppu) to the Justice Ministry (see below).

This does not, however, preclude the involvement of other people, not among these citizens, in meetings for worship or other group activities. Society for Krishna Consciousness lawyer Mikhail Frolov thinks that the amendments will not stop people in the stipulated categories from worshipping with others, as participants in worship are not the same as participants in a religious group, who technically should only be those whose names are submitted to the Justice Ministry, he told Forum 18 on 22 April.

Nevertheless, the ambiguity of the law has already led to problematic police practice in relation to missionary activity – an individual is often accused of carrying out missionary activity on behalf of a religious group without its authorisation (required under the Religion Law), as the local Justice Ministry has no evidence that the group submitted notification of its activities.

This is sometimes because the person is acting only on his or her own behalf, sometimes because no group exists in any formal sense. Police and prosecutors have nevertheless assumed the individual to be a group participant or leader without any written evidence of the fact. It seems likely that application of the new amendments will be similarly indiscriminate in this regard.

"Formally, there is no ban on participation in divine services," Olga Sibiryova of the SOVA Center noted to Forum 18 on 14 May, "but we again run into the issue of interpreting the norms contained in the amendments. Since today there are cases when participation in worship services is regarded as illegal missionary work, it cannot be ruled out that attendance at worship services will be interpreted as participation in a religious group."

"Those authorities that are directly involved in monitoring and tracing individuals who are on certain lists for extremism and terrorism now have an additional opportunity to issue [formal] warnings to religious associations about the inadmissibility of extremist activities," lawyer Vasily Nichik noted to Forum 18 on 17 May. "This kind of warning is not harmless, because several warnings can already serve as the basis for accusations of extremist activities."

Mikhail Shakhov, President of the Guild of Experts on Religion and Law, argues that the lack of legal definition of "participant" (uchastnik), "follower" (posledovatel), and – prior to the current amendments – "member" (chlen), and the lack of any formal process of making people any of these things (unless they are among the "founder members" (uchrediteli) named in an organisation's charter) "opens up ample opportunities for circumventing" Article 2, Paragraph 3 of the Religion Law. This 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".

### ***"Sad experience of law enforcement practice"***

The current set of amendments also removes most uses of the word "member" [chlen] from the text of the law, leaving people involved in religious associations to be described only as "participants" [uchastniki], or sometimes "followers" [posledovately].

While this should technically have little impact on the everyday lives of believers and their communities (as "member" was in most instances accompanied by the word "participant" anyway), there is some concern over how this change may affect the attitudes and actions of police and prosecutors.

Some fear that police or prosecutors will regard anyone present at a religious meeting to be a "participant", allowing action against individuals and religious communities for alleged infringements of the new bans.

"The sad experience of law enforcement practice suggests that representatives of law enforcement agencies will not go into details, and for them everyone present at a worship service or even a friendly tea party where the Bible is being studied will be participants," Pentecostal Bishop Sergey Ryakhovsky commented to RIA Novosti on 21 September 2020.

Ryakhovsky fears that if police or prosecutor's office officials find a member of a banned extremist organisation (even one who has already served their sentence) at a meeting of a religious organisation or group, they will deem that organisation or group leader to be breaking the law.

"Before the worship service, the priest will have to make sure that no extremist or person who has financed extremism has entered the church building," Ryakhovsky said. "I'm sorry, but how can this be done?"

"It can be assumed that law enforcement officers will not be guided by formal definitions – or not only by them," Olga Sibiryova of the SOVA Center commented to Forum 18 on 14 May. "The amendments provide an opportunity to manipulate the wording, for example, 'member' – 'participant'. Confusion with these terms will arise among the believers themselves, and this will certainly be used against them."

The situation may become clearer if corresponding offences and penalties are introduced to the Administrative Code.

The ban on certain people's participation in religious groups may present greater complications for religious communities than that on participation in religious organisations, as organisations at least have the option of defining in their statutes who counts as a member (now participant, as per the amendments).

As Mikhail Shakhov, President of the Guild of Experts on Religion and Law, pointed out in comments for the Institute of State Service and Administration on 1 July 2019, however, this is not always done. The model statutes for Russian Orthodox (Moscow Patriarchate) parishes, for example, contain no mention of participants or members.

The absence of such definitions in statutes may be because the religious communities' beliefs about their internal organisation do not include a category of "member", as is the case for Orthodox churches.

As the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) / Venice Commission Guidelines for Review of Legislation Pertaining to Religion or Belief state: "It is reasonable to suggest that the State should be very reluctant to involve itself in any matters regarding issues of faith, belief, or the internal organization of a religious group. However, when the interests of religious or belief groups conflict with other societal interests, the State should engage in a careful and nuanced weighing of interests, with a strong deference towards autonomy except in those cases where autonomy is likely to lead to a clear and identifiable harm."

"In my view, the amendments to the Religion Law are aimed at depriving Russian citizens of their last hope of using their constitutional right to [freedom of] religion," Jehovah's Witness lawyer Yegiazar Chernikov commented to Forum 18 on 1 May.

"Insofar as all Jehovah's Witnesses facing criminal prosecution today are accused of extremism precisely for exercising their constitutional rights and freedoms and this is considered by investigative agencies to be extremist activity," Chernikov added, "then anybody who participates in the expression of their faith with relatives and friends will fall under the ban imposed by these amendments. Consequently, if earlier the Constitution left a chance remaining to believers, now they are deprived of their last hope of using their constitutional rights. In my view, this repressive law forces you to give up your faith. It is a cunning and veiled replacement of rights with 'criminal activity'."

In its explanatory note of 21 July 2020, appended to the Religion Law amendments (then in draft form), the Duma Committee for the Development of Civil Society and Issues of Public and Religious Associations noted that the ban on these categories of people leading or participating in religious groups was "due to the need to protect the foundations of the constitutional order, [and] the morality, health, rights and legitimate interests of person and citizen, [and] to ensure the country's defence and state security, and it should be considered a preventive measure for managing the risks of involving members of a religious group in extremist activities and activities aimed at financing terrorism".

Defence, state security, and managing risks are not among the legitimate reasons for restricting the exercise of freedom of religion or belief under Russia's legally binding international human rights obligations.

Forum 18 wrote to the office of Human Rights Ombudsperson Tatyana Moskalkova before the start of the working day of 11 May, asking why the amendments had been introduced on these grounds. Forum 18 also noted that some people on the Rosfinmonitoring "List of Terrorists and Extremists" have not been convicted of or even charged with any offence, yet would now be barred from participation in religious groups, and asked if Moskalkova had any comment on this. Forum 18 had received no reply as of the end of the working day on 17 May.

### ***Notification now required three times as often***

Since July 2015, religious groups have been obliged to inform regional branches of the Justice Ministry of their composition and activities when they are set up, and submit notification of their continued activity every three years. This does not make them legal entities.

Once the amendments come into force, such notification will have to be submitted every year, thereby increasing the bureaucratic burden on religious groups, which are usually small, and – as they are not legal entities – cannot employ staff. The increase in frequency also creates more opportunities for groups to fall foul of the law.

This requirement for the leaders of religious groups (or the centralised religious organisations with which they are affiliated) to submit such information breaks Russia's legally-binding obligations under international human rights law, which do not allow the exercise of freedom of religion and belief to be made dependent on state permission.

Some religious communities – such as Council of Churches Baptists – choose not to inform the state of their activity or seek permission for it, as is their right under international human rights law. This leaves them at risk of raids and prosecutions for exercising their right to freedom of religion or belief.

The yearly notification must contain the same information as is currently only required at the beginning of a religious group's existence. This comprises a description of its religious affiliation, the name of its leader, the names and addresses of "citizens, belonging to the religious group" ("svedeniya o grazhdanakh, vkhodyashchikh v religioznuyu gruppu"), and the addresses of all locations where it meets.

"The state is trying to regulate [and] bring under control all [and] any religious activity of its citizens," Pentecostal Bishop Konstantin Bendas commented on the Pentecostal Union's website on 24 July 2020, describing this as "an unnecessary and dangerous tendency".

According to the bill's explanatory note of 21 July 2020, seen by Forum 18, the increase in frequency of notification "is associated with the instability of the composition of the members (followers) of a religious group, which, in turn, as the analysis of law enforcement practice in this field of activity has shown, creates difficulties in identifying religious groups that previously submitted notification of the commencement or continuation of their activities".

In its conclusions on the bill of 16 September 2020, the Duma Committee for the Development of Civil Society and Issues of Public and Religious Associations wrote that the more frequent notification requirement would "allow state bodies and society as a whole to receive timely information on the activities of religious groups and strengthen the prevention of possible violations of the legislation of the Russian Federation".

Forum 18 wrote to the Committee before the start of the working day of 11 May, asking why the state authorities need to have such information on religious groups, and why the authorities' permission is considered necessary for the exercise of freedom of religion and belief. Forum 18 received no reply as of the end of the working day of 17 May.

The amendments also oblige regional Justice Ministry branches to acknowledge in writing their receipt of religious groups' submission of notification within five days. This is a positive change, Forum 18 notes, as such written acknowledgement gives religious groups evidence of their compliance with the law and a clear indication of when they were formally established.

A lack of notification (or lack of proof of such) is one of the commonest reasons for the prosecution of individuals for "unlawful missionary activity" under Administrative Code Article 5.26, Part 4 ("Russians conducting missionary activity").

"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 2020. He noted that at that time the Religion Law contained "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."

### ***Ban on religious names for some legal entities***

Once the amendments come into force in October, legal entities will not be able to use "information about religion" [svedeniya o veroispovedanii] in their names unless:

- they were founded by religious organisations (or a religious organisation is a member);
- or they are public organisations or public movements which have obtained written permission to do so from a centralised religious organisation of the corresponding confessional affiliation.



"Information about religion", according to lawyers who have commented to Forum 18, refers to mention of specific religions or denominations (such as "Christian", "Muslim", "Orthodox", etc.), not merely to any terms with a religious connotation (such as "church", "parish" or "umma").

Society for Krishna Consciousness lawyer Mikhail Frolov noted, however, that it is unclear how this will be applied in practice: "We have a country of unlimited possibilities."

Under Russian law, a "public organisation" [obshchestvennaya organizatsiya] is "a membership-based public association created on the basis of joint activities to protect common interests and achieve the statutory goals of the associated citizens". A public movement [obshchestvennoye dvizheniye] is "a mass public association which consists of participants and is not based on membership, pursuing social, political, or other socially useful aims".

Commercial enterprises – including, for example, Islamic or Christian bookshops if these have no formal association with a religious organisation – will therefore have to remove references to religious affiliations from their names. They must bring their statutes into line with this requirement by 1 January 2022.

It is unclear from whom a public organisation or movement should seek permission, if there is no obvious corresponding centralised religious organisation.

"There is a practice among religions in Russia, not only among Protestants, of not only religious organisations creating NGOs, but also parishioners," Pentecostal Bishop Sergey Ryakhovsky commented to RIA Novosti on 8 April 2021.

"For example, such names as 'Foundation for the Support of Christian Culture'. To what confession should they be attributed?" Ryakhovsky asked. "We do not have a Christian church – there are Orthodox, Catholics, Protestants. The same with Muslims – there are many Islamic centralised religious organisations in Russia – from whom should a hypothetical 'Foundation for Islamic Culture' ask permission?"

"I believe that there is objectivity in this [amendment]", Seventh-day Adventist lawyer Vasily Nichik commented to Forum 18 on 17 May, "because it is not referring to religious associations, but to public, non-profit [organisations], which, when they use a confessional name, emphasise their belonging to a particular religion, which means to a certain extent they can either strengthen, or denigrate [and] discredit the image of religious associations professing a particular faith."

### ***"Innovations that simplify the lives of religious organisations"***

Alongside its restrictive measures, the amendments also contain some "innovations that simplify the lives of religious organisations", as it streamlines the registration procedure for religious organisations, according to Olga Sibiryova's 29 April religious freedom report for the Moscow-based SOVA Center for Information and Analysis.

The amendments also oblige Justice Ministry branches to within five days provide religious groups with written confirmation that they have submitted notification of their activities.

Police and prosecutors have used the apparent absence of such notification as evidence in anti-missionary prosecutions of individuals for "unlawful missionary activity" under Administrative Code Article 5.26, Part 4 ("Russians conducting missionary activity").

"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 2020. He noted that at that time the Religion Law contained "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."

This is a positive change, Forum 18 notes, as such written acknowledgement gives religious groups evidence of their compliance with the law and a clear indication of when they were formally established.

### **Other changes**

The amendments also include a number of other changes:

- if a religious organisation belongs to a foreign religious organisation, it must indicate the latter's name in its statutes;
- centralised religious organisations may include in their statutes a bar on local religious organisations withdrawing from their oversight;
- the registration process for religious organisations has been simplified by the removal of requirements to provide the address of an organisation's permanent governing body and a copy of the organisation's statutes. The Justice Ministry will now have to request the latter if needed.

---

## **FECRIS says the persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia is propaganda**

***"All tales of alleged 'harassment' against Jehovah's Witnesses [in Russia] are nothing more than a primitive propaganda stroke. This information is not true," FECRIS says.***

### **Willy Fautré, Human Rights Without Frontiers**

HRWF (25.05.2021) - This quote from FECRIS (European Federation of Centres of Research and Information on Cults and Sects), is from the decision of a German court which condemned FECRIS for defaming the movement of Jehovah's Witnesses in public statements in the framework of its conferences from 2009 to 2017 that were posted on its website. Several disputed statements concerned Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia. This is not surprising as the vice-president of FECRIS is Alexander Dvorkin, the well-known anti-cult activist of the Russian Orthodox Church against whom USCIRF (US Commission on International Religious Freedom) asked the US to take sanctions (see p 7 on top of the sanctions): "*Publicly censure Alexander Dvorkin and the Saint Irenaeus of Leon Information-Consultation Center (SILIC) for their ongoing disinformation campaign against religious minorities.*" See more on FECRIS [here](#).

On 27 November 2020, the District Court of Hamburg released its verdict in the case [Jehovah's Witnesses in Germany v. FECRIS](#) (Ref. 324 O 334/18) about a long list of 32 claimed defamatory statements: 17 were fully justified and one was partially justified.

Jehovah's Witnesses in Germany considered that a number of slanderous statements in dispute about Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia could adversely impact their right to asylum



as FECRIS denies that they are persecuted in Russia and states that they are criminals. The two main statements are analyzed below.

### ***FECRIS' most slanderous statement about Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia***

The statement below related to Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia needs to be understood in the context of the ban of Jehovah's Witnesses as an "extremist organization" in 2017, the enforced liquidation of their 395 communities, the confiscation of all their places of worship and properties by the Russian State. They quote is from the judgment of the District Court of Hamburg.

*"(...), all tales of alleged 'harassment' against Jehovah's Witnesses [in Russia] are nothing more than a primitive propaganda stroke. This information is not true."*

*"(...) the ban on Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia was ordered on the basis of a law and thus did not occur arbitrarily or without cause. In the broader context, the statement could not be understood in any other way than to the effect that stories were not true that Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia were 'harassed' without reason, but that any official measures were due to the ban on Jehovah's Witnesses, which was based on a law. No one is 'harassed' or persecuted with state measures simply because he or she is an adherent of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia."*

Reports by numerous human rights organizations – [Human Rights Watch](#) and [Amnesty International](#) - , the [United Nations](#), the [US Commission of International Religious Freedom](#), the [US Department of State](#), and statements by other international institutions ruthlessly contradict and ridicule FECRIS' position. See as well as cases documented by [Human Rights Without Frontiers](#) and its [FORB Prisoners Database](#).

---

## **Jehovah's Witness Rustam Seidkuliev sentenced to 2.5 years in prison for talking about the Bible**



In the photo: Rustam Seidkuliev in the courtroom. Photo: Courtesy Jehovah's Witnesses

JW.ORG (20.05.2021) - <https://bit.ly/3faBev0> - On May 20, 2021 judge of Leninskiy District Court of Saratov Andrey Efimov found Rustam Seidkuliev guilty under part 2 of article 282.2 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation (participation in activity of extremist organization). The believer was taken into custody in the courtroom.

Seidkuliev was sentenced to 2.5 years of imprisonment in a general regime colony and 1 year of restricted freedom after his release. The court took into account the 7 months that Rustam spent under house arrest: 217 days corresponding to 108 and a half days of imprisonment. Thus, the believer has to spend over two years in prison.

The verdict did not come into force, and can be appealed. The believer insists on his complete innocence. The state prosecutor requested that he be sentenced to four years' imprisonment in a general regime penal colony.

After getting acquainted with biblical doctrines, Seidkuliev decided to lead a peaceful life, not to take up arms and not to learn how to fight. For his refusal to join the army, he was convicted twice (in 1995 and 1996) and spent 1 year and 8 months in a minimum-security penal colony in Turkmenistan. Twenty-five years later, Rustam found himself in court again only because of his faith.

A criminal case against Rustam Seidkuliev was initiated on January 29, 2020. He learned about it on February 15, 2020, when police officers detained him along with his wife in a shopping center. It was announced to Rustam that he was wanted, and later he was placed in a special detention center for 5 days.

On February 20, 2020. On February 20, 2020, Seidkuliev was taken for a search, after which he was transported by car to Saratov. On the morning of February 22, 2020, the court ordered that he be placed under house arrest for two months. This preventive measure was later extended to 7 months and 8 days, and in September 2020 it was changed to a ban on certain actions. One month later, the investigator confined himself to a written pledge not to leave.

The case of Seidkuliev was investigated by the bodies of the Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation in the Saratov region for a year and two months. On 30 March 2021, the case went to court. The case was considered for more than a year.

As stated in the indictment, Seidkuliev, "acting from extremist motives, realizing that by his actions he undermines the foundations of the constitutional order and state security", continued to participate in worship services and talk to others about God. This accusation was made against Rustam in court, despite the fact that Article 28 of the Constitution of the Russian Federation guarantees every citizen "the right to practice...any religion or not to practice any religion. Neither the Supreme Court nor any other court has ever restricted this right as applied to Jehovah's Witnesses.

The OSCE, the European Union, Russian human rights activists, and many others condemn the persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia.

### ***Elderly, infirmed widow convicted***

On 19 May 2021, the Nadezhdinskiy District Court of the Primorye Territory sentenced 73-year-old [Lyudmila Shut](#) to a four-year suspended prison sentence.

In her final statement to the court, Lyudmila said: "I have the right to be a religious person!

"I am not a criminal and I am not an extremist. I do not know such a terrible word at all. This is something alien to me and completely contradicts my religious views"

For additional details about her case, see [link](#)

For images, see [link](#). Please credit: Courtesy of Jehovah's Witnesses

### **Nationwide Persecution in Russia and Crimea**

- **223** criminal cases, involving **440** believers
- **34** men and women have been convicted in 2021. At this rate, 2021 could see double the number of convictions from 2020 (**39**), which was more than double the total in 2019 (**18**)
- **61** in prison (the most since 2017 Supreme Court ruling)
- **34** under house arrest
- **1,437** homes of Witnesses raided since the 2017 Supreme Court ruling that liquidated the Witnesses' legal entities

---

## **Special bimonthly FORB (01-15.05.2021)**

### **14.05.2021 - How will re-training of foreign-trained clergy be implemented?**

From October, when new Religion Law amendments come into force, all clergy, religious teachers and missionaries working for registered religious organisations who have trained abroad will need to undertake a course in "state-confessional relations in the Russian Federation". They will then need to be re-certified by a centralised religious organisation before being permitted to begin work for the first time. How the amendments will be applied in practice "is a big question", commented Stanislav Kulov of the Slavic Centre for Law and Justice.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **14.05.21 - Freedom of conscience, thought and religion**

On April 8, Marina Matiushenko, 'a judge of peace', issued a warning to the «**LOVE OF CHRIST**» Church of Evangelical Pentecostal Christians under Art. 5.26 of the Code of Administrative Offences (*Illegal Missionary Activity*) for publications on a social network describing the activities of the organization.

The administrative proceedings under RF CoAO article 5.26 were also started against the «**Bread of Life**» Church of Evangelical Christians, Kerch City.

In April, the CHRG registered 3 new administrative proceedings in Crimea under Art. 5.26 of the Code of Administrative Offences of the Russian Federation, including 2 — regarding the **Alushta Muslim community** and its **imam Yusuf Ashyrov** based on the reports drawn up after the search in the mosque on March 30, 2021. The imam was accused of conducting Friday prayers, and the community was accused of having religious literature in the mosque.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **14.05.21 - Vladivostok Appeal Court upholds the guilty verdict against 77-year-old Jehovah's Witness Vladimir Filippov**

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/05/141410.html>

On May 14, 2021, the Primorye Territory Court in Vladivostok upheld the [sentence](#) to Vladimir Filippov for his faith. The court considered the peaceful confession of the religion of Jehovah's Witnesses to be the activity of a banned legal entity. However, the court overturned the order to destroy material evidence.

**[Continue reading...](#)**

### **14.05.21 - Six accused and new articles. Court hearings on second case against Jehovah's Witnesses begin in Karpinsk**

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/05/140833.html>

On April 29, 2021, the Karpinsky City Court received a second case against Alexander Pryanikov, Daria and Venus Dulov. This time, three more defendants appear in the case: Anastasia Pryanikova, Svetlana Zalyaeva and her husband Ruslan, who is not a Jehovah's Witness. Judge Vera Dranitsina will consider the case.

**[Continue reading...](#)**

### **13.05.21 - An appeal in Birobidzhan toughens the sentence against Yuliya Kaganovich**

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/05/131516.html>

On May 13, 2021, the Court of the Jewish Autonomous Region toughened the verdict handed down to Yuliya Kaganovich by the court of first instance for participating in the activities of a banned organization. Judges replaced the previously appointed monetary fine for 2.5 years of imprisonment with a suspended sentence of 1 year.

**[Continue reading...](#)**

### **13.05.21 - An appeal in Birobidzhan upheld the conditional sentence of 56-Year-Old believer Konstantin Guzev**

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/05/131312.html>

On May 13, 2021, the Court of the Jewish Autonomous Region upheld the sentence to Konstantin Guzev from Birobidzhan - 2.5 years of suspended imprisonment with restriction of liberty for 1 year.

**[Continue reading...](#)**

### **13.05.21 - Jehovah's Witness woman's legal appeal proves costly**

Link to full text in Russian: <https://credo.press/237168/>

A court in the Jewish autonomous oblast made the sentence more severe for the Jehovah's Witness Svetlana Monis, who had previously been found guilty of extremism because of her faith in Jehovah. She was given a punishment in the form of a suspended

sentence of 2.5 years with a probation of two years, a correspondent for the portal Credo.Press reports, citing a source within the Russian Jehovah's Witnesses.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **11.05.21 - Attempts to eliminate Siberia's autonomous Jewish region**

Deputy Prime Minister Marat Khusnullin has proposed to unite it with the Khabarovsk region. It is a small and poor region (220,000 inhabitants), but Jews have taken refuge in this area since the tsar's pogroms to escape persecution.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **07.05.21 - Russian Hindus prohibited from celebrating Maha Shivratri Festival**

A woman who organized the celebration in Udmurtia was charged for "illegal missionary activity."

[Continue reading...](#)

### **06.05.21 - Konstantin Bazhenov, convicted for his faith, released from the colony, but detained for deportation**

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/05/2.html>

On 5 May 2021, 45-year-old Konstantin Bazhenov was released on parole from the penal colony in Dimitrovgrad but was sent to the temporary detention center for foreign citizens, as his Russian citizenship was [revoked](#) due to criminal prosecution. The believer will be deported to the territory of Ukraine.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **04.05.21 - New searches in Kuzbass: Two believers from Kaltan Town were detained**

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/05/1.html>

On the morning of May 2, 2021, searches were carried out in the small town of Kaltan, Kemerovo Region. Two men, 49-year-old Vitaliy Syrykh and 53-year-old Aleksandr Tsikunov, were detained and sent to a temporary detention center.

[Continue reading...](#)

## **SOVA Center annual report on freedom of religion: Restrictions and Challenges in 2020**

***This short version of the report was published in [Talk About: Law and Religion](#), Blog of the International Center for Law and Religion Studies. See full version at <https://bit.ly/2Sy8fbF>***

By [Olga Sibireva](#) is the head of the Religion in Secular Society project at the Moscow-based SOVA Center for Information and Analysis

SOVA Center (04.05.2021) - <https://bit.ly/3f13YVA> - In this blog post, I will briefly explain some recent Russian developments regarding freedom of religion or belief protections in 2020. The post is based on the April 2021 report [released](#) by the Moscow-based human rights monitor, the SOVA-Center. Generally, Russia did not make any positive progress concerning challenges to freedom of religion or belief that emerged in previous years.

### ***Persecution of Religious Minorities***

Since 2017, Jehovah's Witnesses have been banned in Russia as an extremist organization. Leaders and members of Jehovah's Witnesses' communities can be fined and punished criminally for professing their religion. While in 2019 there were 18 criminal sentences of Jehovah's Witnesses, this number increased to 25 in 2020, and 13 people were sentenced to prison time. Overall, more than 400 believers have been prosecuted. New criminal cases were initiated less than a year ago, which means that the authorities will continue to prosecute Jehovah's Witnesses. Additionally, human rights monitors regularly [report](#) cases of violence against detained believers.

Jehovah's Witnesses are not the only victims of Russian authorities. The SOVA-Center has identified several cases of criminal persecution against other religious and belief organizations, including the Church of the Last Testament, the Church of Scientology, and the Church of the Flying Macaroni Monster. For example, in the Krasnoyarsk Region, four police helicopters were used to detain three leaders of the Church of the Last Testament, although the religious organization and its leaders preach peace, live in an ecovillage, and have never been reported as being involved in extremist activities. The number of such incidents and the severity of the measures applied against these believers proves that these prosecutions were a pressure campaign conducted by the State.

Many communities and believers were fined for so-called "illegal missionary activities," that is, activities not licensed or sanctioned by the State following the [Yarovaya-Ozerov law](#) that severely restricted missionary activities in Russia. While in 2019 we observed decreasing numbers of such cases, the trend has changed in 2020. Although Islam is legally recognized as one of the "traditional religions" in Russia, in the first half of 2020 Muslims were prosecuted for illegal missionary activities even more often than Protestants, which are the usual targets of the State. Most of the cases were initiated against Muslim believers who belong to Muslim communities that do not recognize the jurisdiction of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims in Crimea—a central administrative body for Muslims in Crimea that is politically loyal to Russian authorities. This means that their prosecution is part of a broader policy of strengthening pressure on religious minorities considered to be disloyal to the Russian government.

### ***New Restrictive Legislation***

In 2020 the [Russian religious law](#) was amended with several new provisions aimed to further restrict freedom of religion or belief. In particular, these amendments require that



priests and employees of religious organizations who have received spiritual education abroad must pass mandatory re-certification and re-education in Russia. Although this requirement only applies to Russian citizens starting their religious activities in Russia after the law comes into effect, it can significantly burden Buddhist and Catholic communities, because these groups do not have religious schools in Russia.

Another amendment replaces the term “member [of a religious group]” with “participant.” This amendment is problematic for many Christian groups whose theology is based on the concept of “church membership.” Now they may be required to amend their charters and exclude the term “church member” from them. Finally, since 2020 persons included on the [List of Terrorists and Extremists](#) operated by the Federal Financing Monitoring Service (*Rosfinmonitoring*) are prohibited from being a leader or even a participant of the religious groups. This prohibition directly contradicts both international standards of religious freedom and the national Constitution which protects the right to practice their religion together with others.

### ***Using Religious Properties***

Religious organizations, most often Protestants, often face difficulties with using existing buildings. In some cases, the authorities even demand the demolition of buildings already used by religious organizations. For example, the Kaluga District Court banned the Word of Life Church of Evangelical Christians from using the building of the Cathedral of Christ the Savior for its services. The community appealed the decision to the higher court but failed to prevail.

The construction of new churches, especially church buildings belonging to the dominant Russian Orthodox Church (ROC), remains a source of tension in society, but the level of tension has not increased in 2020. As in the previous year, most of the conflicts over construction were around poor location choices for construction sites (for example, when an Orthodox church building planned to replace a park or a recreation zone) and procedural violations during the construction site selection process. In contrast to previous years, the residents were less successful in convincing the authorities to stop such constructions, but there were almost no cases when the authorities did not take into account the opinion of the locals: as a rule, they managed to find a compromise. For example, residents of Omsk protested against building a church in one of the public parks because it would require cutting down the trees and moving the dog run. The authorities approved the construction but agreed to cut fewer trees and ordered the Orthodox diocese to pay for cutting them down and to plant new trees after the construction.

### ***Freedom of Speech and Protection of Religious Feelings***

Criminal and administrative prosecutions for “insulting religious feelings” and similar offenses (Art. 146 of the Russian Criminal Code and Art. 5.26 of the Russian Code of Administrative Offences) were even less prevalent than a year ago. Due to COVID-19, the activity of public defenders of “religious feelings” was also relatively low and usually peaceful. Most of the protests were organized by the same groups of believers who have been active in this area for several years, like an ultra-conservative Orthodox movement “[Forty Forties](#).”

Most of these conflicts were resolved through compromises rather than through criminal prosecution against the organizers of cultural events and performances. We have found almost no cases where religious protests were strong enough to force the authorities or organizers to cancel a certain cultural event.

### ***Anti-Epidemic Measures and Religiously Motivated Violence and Hatred***

Anti-epidemic restrictions did not significantly affect the situation with freedom of religion. Most religious groups followed the government’s directives to cancel or restrict in-person meetings and turned their services online. However, the Corona epidemic seems to have [worsened](#) the relationship between the ROC and the State. The ROC was

the only religious group that publicly and loudly protested against restricting attendance at services. Even now, while the ROC leadership agreed to follow the State's anti-epidemic policies and called on believers to do the same, many priests remain skeptical concerning the measure applied.

While the level of religiously motivated violence in 2020 was quite low, labeling religious minorities in the media, including the federal channels, remains a serious problem. As before, the main targets of this labeling are Protestants and new religious movements. A new surge in "anti-sectarian" publications and TV programs was partly inspired by the coronavirus epidemic. For example, in April, the Bryansk regional media, followed by several federal media including the biggest country-wide TV channel, *Channel One*, reported an outbreak of the disease among the parishioners of the Revival Church of Christians of the Evangelical Faith in Bryansk. The believers were de facto accused of intentionally infecting others, while many media outlets incorrectly indicated the confessional affiliation of those who got sick; they misidentified them as Baptists.

### **Conclusion**

Russia remains a country where freedom of religion or belief is [severely restricted](#). The state's prosecution of and discrimination against religious minorities, actions that deprive believers of their basic religious rights (such as the right to practice religion freely or use their properties for religious purposes), as well as the stigmatization of religious minority believers in the media, including state-controlled media, are widespread. As the country is moving towards a [more authoritarian regime](#) and the state continues to [strengthen](#) its control over civil society, I see no ground for improving the freedom of religion or belief situation in the short-term view.

---

## **Special bimonthly FORB (16-30.04.2021)**

### **30.04.2021 - Religious minorities increasingly face difficulties in Russia**

In April 2019, the Russian authorities interrupted the Sunday service of a Baptist community in Verkhnebakansky. They accused the community of using a residential property for worship. However, under Russian law, the use of premises provided by a member is the only lawful way a religious group can meet. Vitaliy Bak, the leader of the group, seeks to remedy the violations by the Russian Federation of his right to practice his faith freely. Yet, in July, the authorities returned to seal off a large part of his house preventing any use.

Pastor Bak's final appeal in Russia was refused. With the help of ADF International, he has now taken his case to the European Court of Human Rights alleging violations of his right to freedom of religion and assembly. The Court is yet to decide whether or not his case will be heard.

**[Continue reading...](#)**



### **29.04.21 - An appeal in Birobidzhan upheld the suspended sentence for Igor Tsarev, one of Jehovah's Witnesses**

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/04/25.html>

On April 29, 2021, the Jewish Autonomous Region Court upheld Birobidzhan-based Igor Tsarev's two-and-a-half-year suspended sentence with a year of the restriction of freedom and a probationary period of two years. The court determined that peaceful practicing of the faith of Jehovah's Witnesses to be participation in the activities of a banned organization.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **29.04.21 - Crimean Pentecostals acknowledge breaking anti-evangelism law**

Link to full text in Russian: <http://article28.ru/infringement/385/>

On 8 April, a magistrate judge of judicial district No. 58 of the Krasnoperekopsk judicial district of the republic of Crimea ruled that the local religious organization "Love of Christ Church of Christians of Evangelical Faith Pentecostals" of the city of Krasnoperekopsk is guilty of committing the administrative violation of law specified in part 3 of article 526 of the Code of Administrative Violations of Law of the R.F.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **26.04.21 - Court rebuffs prosecutor's request to imprison Jehovah's Witnesses for very long terms**

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

The Promyshlennyi district court of the city of Smolensk sentenced a resident of Smolensk to a 6-year-6-month suspended sentence; he tried to revive the activity of a regional division of the religious organization of the "Administrative Center of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia." Three companions joined him in the defendants' dock.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **26.04.21 - A Court in Smolensk sentenced three of Jehovah's Witnesses to a suspended sentence of 6 to 6.5 years for reading the Bible**

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/04/24.html>

On April 23, 2021, the Industrial District Court of Smolensk found Valeriy Shalev, Yevgeniy Deshko and Ruslan Korolev guilty of organizing extremist activities in connection with their practice of the religion of Jehovah's Witnesses. Instead of the imprisonment requested by the prosecutor, the believers were assigned suspended sentences.

[Continue reading...](#)

**23.04.21 - In the Smolensk region, Mariya Troshina and Nataliya Sorokina received 6 years of suspended sentence for reading the Bible**

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/04/23.html>

On April 22, 2021, the judge of the Sychevka District Court of the Smolensk Region, Arkadiy Likhachev, found Mariya Troshina and Nataliya Sorokina guilty of allegedly organizing the activities of an extremist organization. For their faith in Jehovah God, they were sentenced to 6 years of suspended imprisonment with a probation period of 3 years.

[Continue reading...](#)

**23.04.21 - Baptist preacher punished for allegedly violating anti-evangelism law**

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

In April 2021, a minister of the church of Evangelical Christians-Baptists (EKHB) was fined for "illegal" evangelism in Obninsk. In January, unidentified persons arrived at a meeting being conducted by him in a private home; after that visit the home was visited by F.S.B. agents.

[Continue reading...](#)

**22.04.21 - Appeal Court in Birobidzhan toughens the sentence for Yelena Reyno-Chernyshova for her faith. The fine was replaced with a suspended sentence**

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/04/22.html>

On April 22, 2021, the court of the Jewish Autonomous Region dismissed the appeal of Yelena Reyno-Chernyshova and satisfied the appeal of the prosecutor by toughening her sentence to 2.5 years of probation and 1 year of restraint.

[Continue reading...](#)

**20.04.21 - Jehovah's Witnesses persecuted in 65 regions of Russia: Mass searches took place in Adygea, one sent to a pre-trial detention center**

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/04/21.html>

On April 16, 2021, in the city of Maikop, the capital of the Republic of Adygea, searches were carried out supposedly at 5 addresses of Jehovah's Witnesses. Several men and women were questioned. 46-year-old Inver Siyukhov was placed in a pre-trial detention center for 2 months.

[Continue reading...](#)

**20.04.21 - The Court of Appeal toughened the verdict for faith to Larisa Artamonova from Birobidzhan. The fine is replaced with a suspended sentence**

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/04/20.html>

On April 20, 2021, the court of the Jewish Autonomous Region, having considered the prosecutor's submission and Larisa Artamonova's complaint against the verdict, replaced a fine of 10,000 rubles for 2.5 years of probation and 1 year of restraint of liberty. She is condemned for believing in Jehovah God. The verdict entered into force.

[Continue reading...](#)

#### **19.04.21 - Absurd misapplication of anti-evangelism law corrected**

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

On 1 April 2021, the Uzlovaya city court of Tula oblast acquitted two believers who are members of the church of Christian Seventh-day Adventists, who in January 2021 were held administratively accountable (a fine of 5,000 rubles for each) for reading the Bible and praying during their worship service. This incident drew the attention of the public after publication on the internet in February of this year of an article by Oleg Goncharov, "Christian believers in Uzlovaya fined for lacking permission for reading the Bible, praying, and singing."

[Continue reading...](#)

#### **16.04.21 - Jehovah's Witness faces longest prison term**

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

A sentence of 7.5 years in a penal colony of ordinary regime was left in force for 63-year-old Jehovah's Witness Alexander Ivshin. OVDInfo was told this in the European Association of Jehovah's Witnesses.

[Continue reading...](#)

#### **16.04.21 - In Izhevsk, a series of raids took place in homes of Jehovah's Witnesses. Two people sent to jail for their faith**

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/04/19.html>

On April 14, 2021, at least 12 addresses of Jehovah's Witnesses were searched in Izhevsk (Udmurtia). 6 men between the ages of 31 and 56 were detained, two were taken into custody. The believers are accused under Part 1 of Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation (organization of extremist activities).

[Continue reading...](#)

---

## **Russian authorities prohibit use of church building**

ADF International (28.04.2021) - <https://bit.ly/3aRfZf4> - A Christian church is challenging Russian authorities at the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) for seizing the congregation's property and leaving the community to gather outside in a

tent. Throughout a 20-year-long legal battle, the municipality has sought to seize the Word of Life Church's property in Kaluga near Moscow. The global human rights organization ADF International has filed two applications on behalf of the church at the Court in Strasbourg. The Court's decision could impact the lives of more than 800 million Europeans in 47 countries, including Russia.

"No one should be persecuted because of their faith. Religious worship in community is a fundamental right and part of the very essence of a church's existence and mission. The authorities in Kaluga have set bureaucratic hurdle after hurdle for this Christian minority community for more than 20 years. The current prohibition on the use of the church building takes this one step further and violates the right to freely practice one's faith. We hope the European Court of Human Rights will hear this case and uphold religious freedom and church autonomy in Russia," said Lidia Rieder, Legal Officer for ADF International.

### **Congregation resorts to meeting in tent**

ADF International filed a first application on behalf of the church last October based on the authorities' refusal to recognize the church's ownership of the building. Now, a second application challenges the absolute ban on the use of the building, which a Russian court imposed in March 2020, and which was recently upheld by the Russian Supreme Court. Both cases join several similar cases before the European Court of Human Rights in which Russia employs bureaucratic technicalities as a pretext to stifle religious minorities.

The evangelical Word of Life Church bought the property in 2000, looking to convert it into a meeting place for their religious community. Despite fulfilling the legal requirements, Russian authorities allege that modifications to the building were conducted without a permit. They refused to recognize the church's ownership of the property and prohibited any use of the building whatsoever in March 2020.

Currently, the congregation has resorted to meeting in a tent outside of the property. In both applications to the European Court of Human Rights, ADF International argues that the church's rights to freedom of religion and assembly were violated as they are denied the ability to meet and worship together on their property.

### **Restrictions on Religious Freedom in Russia**

The US Commission on International Religious Freedom designated Russia as a 'country of particular concern' in its 2020 annual report. According to the document, police conduct raids on private homes and places of worship. Religious minority groups report that local authorities have used anti-extremism laws to add religious texts to the government's list of banned books. Officials also prevent religious minority organizations from obtaining land and deny them construction permits for houses of worship.

A separate case which raises similar issues concerns Pastor Vitaliy Bak and his Baptist congregation. They used a private house for religious services in Verkhnebakansky in Southern Russia until the authorities banned them from doing so. In December 2019, ADF International filed [their case](#) at the European Court of Human Rights. Amidst the pandemic, the city administration has [filed a lawsuit](#) and asked the local court in Novorossiysk to order the demolition of the house – in which several people live – simply because religious services were held there. ADF International is representing Pastor Bak at the European Court of Human Rights.

"Everyone has the fundamental right to choose their religion and practice it alone and with others, in public and in private. By ratifying the European Convention on Human

Rights, Russia has agreed to be held to account on its human rights commitments. Respecting the religious freedom of its citizens is not just a right protected by the Convention, but a litmus test for democracy. We are hopeful that the Court will agree to hear the cases of the church in Kaluga as well as Pastor Bak's," said Robert Clarke, Deputy Director of ADF International.

Photo : paristribune.info

---

## **A case of violation of the right to freely practice one's faith in community pending in Strasbourg**

**See video (Russian/ English):** <https://adfinternational.org/campaign/religious-freedom-in-russia/>

**By Willy Fautré, *Human Rights Without Frontiers***

HRWF with ADF Int'l (23.04.2021) – The case against a Protestant pastor deprived of his right to organize religious meetings in his home in Russia is pending at the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg. The case was filed by ADF International and is under review of the Court.

Over the course of several years, a registered group of Evangelical Christian Baptists used to gather in a private house in Verkhnebakansky in Southern Russia. In September 2018, the local authorities filed a lawsuit against the former owner of the building asking the court to ban its use for religious purposes. The administration claimed that there were violations of fire safety and anti-terror provisions, that the building was registered as a residential house and could not be used as a church.

The claim was dismissed in first instance by the district court but the decision was overturned on appeal. According to the new decision, the use of the private building for religious purposes was banned.

In April 2019, the authorities broke into the house during a religious service and demanded its termination and an inspection of the building. Administrative proceedings were initiated against one of the assistant pastors, who was found guilty of conducting "illegal missionary activities".

Representatives of the authorities came back on July 5, 2018, once more interrupting a Sunday service. They demanded that the congregation leave and, subsequently, sealed large parts of the house, including the room where Sunday services were held.

Pastor Vitaliy Bak with the help of his domestic attorney fought over four instances. Yet in October 2019, the fourth instance confirmed the ban, leaving Vitaliy Bak no other option than to appeal to the ECtHR.

After exhaustion of domestic remedies, Vitaliy Bak asked ADF International to represent him before the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg. After completing a fact finding mission and site inspection in October 2019, ADF filed the case in Strasbourg on 4 December 2019. The Court has informed ADF that all the formal criteria had been fulfilled and the case is currently under review at the end of which the Court will determine whether or not to communicate the case to the Russian government.

### **About the legal situation of Vitaliy Bak's congregation**

The 1997 Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Association (with amendments through 2016) serves as the main pillar of the religious legislation.

The law recognises four 'traditional religions' and stresses the special role of the Russian Orthodox Church for its historical contribution to the country's spirituality and culture.

The law establishes several categories of religious entities: 'Religious Groups' (RGs), 'Local Religious Organisations' (LROs) and 'Centralised Religious Organisations' (CROs).

*De facto* religious groups (RGs) have the right to conduct religious rituals and ceremonies, hold worship services, and teach religious doctrines. They are not registered with the government and have therefore no legal personality. They cannot open a bank account, build, buy or rent premises or publish or import religious material. In order to get access to the upper category, a religious group must prove that it has been existing as such for at least 15 years. This is the status of Bak's community.

Local religious organisations (LROs) must consist of no less than ten persons over the age of eighteen that permanently reside in a given area. They are registered both at the federal and the local level. They can open a bank account, buy and own or rent buildings for religious purposes, acquire, import, export and disseminate religious literature, enjoy tax and other benefits, and so on. Additionally, they can also create local religious organisations as affiliates without any waiting period obligation.

Centralised religious organisations (CROs) must consist of no less than three local religious organisations to be eligible for registration as such. They enjoy the same rights as LROs. After 50 years of existence and activity in the country, they can include the word 'Russia(n)' in their official title.

### **About the implementation of the anti-missionary legislation**

Protestants of all non-Orthodox denominations are mainly targeted for their attempts to share their beliefs with other people on the basis of the anti-missionary Varovaya Laws, signed by President Vladimir Putin in summer 2016.

On 23 November 2016, a local prosecutor's office conducted an inspection of the Salvation Army in Vladivostok. A case was opened on the grounds that the organisation 'in its missionary activity uses and distributes literature and printed materials without identifying labels of the religious organization.' On 20 December 2016, the Salvation Army of Vladivostok was found guilty of having religious literature, including 36 copies of the Bible and collections of religious songs in the worship hall, that did not have identification labels with the name of the denomination. The decision concerning the destruction of the Bibles evoked such a great public resonance that the decision was appealed. On 30 December 2016, the order of the magistrate judge was amended: the section about the destruction of the confiscated items was removed but the rest of judge's order remained unchanged. The case was finally dismissed by the Constitutional Court<sup>i</sup>.

In 2016, Indian Protestant pastor Victor-Immanuel Mani, who is married to a Russian woman and has a Russian-born child, was the first foreigner to be deported under Administrative Code Article 5.26, Part 5 ('Foreigners conducting missionary activity'). Naberezhnyye Chelny City Court found him guilty on 20 December 2016 of advertising religious gatherings on social media and allegedly giving religious literature to a non-member of his Church. He was also fined 30,000 Roubles<sup>ii</sup>.



On 16 May 2018, Nosisa Shiba, a student of the final year of the Nizhny Novgorod Medical Academy, a citizen of Swaziland (Africa), was charged on the basis of Article 18.8, Part 4 of the Code of Administrative Violations of Law of the Russian Federation, with a sentence of immediate deportation. The young woman, who had been a protestant since childhood, began going to an Evangelical church of Nizhny Novgorod upon her arrival in Russia. According to the press service of the church, she sang a song about God and his love for people in her church one time. A video of Shiba's performance was found on YouTube by the Federal Security Service (F.S.B.). The court ruled that she be fined 7,000 Roubles and be deported after the completion of her studies<sup>iii</sup>.

### **Conclusion**

This case is all the more important as the individual right to practice one's faith in community in private homes is guaranteed by Article 18 of the Universal Declaration and the ICCPR, ratified by the Russian Federation, but has been repeatedly violated in cases concerning non-Orthodox communities.

Dozens of Jehovah's Witnesses, whose movement was banned in 2017, have been sentenced to several years in prison. Members of Said Nursi followers and Tabligh Jamaat members, two peaceful Muslim movements, are still behind bars for studying the Qu'ran in private meetings.

---

<sup>1</sup> Chugunov, Sergey, 'High Court fixes strict requirements on evangelism', *Religiia i Pravo*, 22 December 2017, [http://www.sclj.ru/news/detail.php?SECTION\\_ID=487&ELEMENT\\_ID=7737&print=Y](http://www.sclj.ru/news/detail.php?SECTION_ID=487&ELEMENT_ID=7737&print=Y) (accessed 31 May 2018).

<sup>1</sup> Arnold, Victoria, 'Russia: Alleged 'missionary activity' prosecutions continue', *Forum18 News Service*, 1 March 2017, [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2261](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2261) (accessed 29 May 2018).

<sup>1</sup> Stetson, 'Russia Religion News: African Pentecostal student sentenced for illegal evangelism', *Stetson.edu*, 17 May 2018 <https://www2.stetson.edu/~psteeves/relnews/180517c.html> (accessed 29 May 2018).

---

## **Campaign: Release Jehovah's Witness Dennis Christensen sentenced to six years in prison!**

**HRWF (19.04.2021) - Human Rights Without Frontiers (HRWF) calls upon Jehovah's Witnesses around the world, people of any other faith and non-believers to request the release of Dennis Christensen, a Danish Jehovah's Witness, sentenced to six years in prison for participating in a religious meeting in 2017.**

To the ambassador of the Russian Federation to the EU [amrusbel@skynet.be](mailto:amrusbel@skynet.be)

Excellency,

Freedom of religion or belief is protected by the Constitution of your country and by numerous human rights instruments, including the European Court of Human Rights.

On 25 May 2017, Dennis Christensen, a 46-year-old Danish citizen, was arrested in Oryol, when heavily armed police officers and agents of the Federal Security Services disrupted a peaceful weekly religious service of Jehovah's Witnesses that he was attending. The local Jehovah's Witness registered religious organisation in Oryol had been declared "extremist" by a local court and liquidated in June 2016 before the nationwide ban. However, it is the right of any individual to adhere to a faith and to practice it in community.

After nearly a year-long criminal trial with over 50 court appearances, Mr. Christensen was sentenced to six years' imprisonment merely for practicing his faith as one of Jehovah's Witnesses.

On 23 June 2020, the Lgovskiy District Court in the Kursk Region mitigated the remainder of Mr. Christensen's sentence to a fine of 400,000 rubles (\$5,759, U.S.). However, Mr. Aleksei Shatunov of the Kursk Regional Public Prosecutor's Office filed an appeal demanding that the court ruling be canceled. The appeal was based on false reports that Mr. Christensen did not have a favorable prison record.

In the meantime, the prison authorities in Labour Camp No. 3 in Lgov placed him in a punishment cell for ten days despite his poor health for alleged minor violations of prison rules, which he denied.

On 26 October 2020, the district court ruled that he should not be released. Kursk Regional Court upheld this decision on 10 February 2021. He may submit a new application only after six months have passed.

We would appreciate that you draw the attention of the relevant authorities of your country to the case of Dennis Christensen and inform them of our call for his release.

Best regards.

Signatories:

---

## **Special bimonthly on freedom of religion or belief (01-15.04.2021)**

### **15.04.21 - Raids and criminal cases for faith in the Tula region. Persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses gripped another region of Russia**

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/04/17.html>

On April 13, 2021, law enforcement officers searched 17 addresses of Jehovah's Witnesses in Tula and the neighboring city of Kireevsk (Tula Region). 58-year-old Gurami Lobadze was placed under house arrest, a case was initiated against him for his faith under Part 1 of Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation (organization of extremist activities).

**Continue reading...**

### **14.04.21 - A new wave of religious persecution in Kholmskaya. Another criminal case for faith opened**

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/04/15.html>

On April 7, 2021, as part of new criminal cases, at least 4 peaceful believers were searched in the village of Kholmetskaya (Krasnodar Territory). The search warrants were issued by judge Aleksandr Kholoshin, who two months earlier had handed down a harsh sentence to Aleksandr Ivshin.

[Continue reading...](#)

#### **14.04.21 - Mass searches in the homes of Jehovah's Witnesses took place in the Yaroslavl Region. At least one believer is detained**

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/04/16.html>

On the morning of April 13, 2021, in Yaroslavl and neighboring Rybinsk, FSB and National Guard officers conducted searches in the homes of believers. The Investigative Committee reports that the raid took place at 31 addresses, but this information is being specified. The 45-year-old father of a young child, Andrey Vyushin, was detained and sent to the temporary detention facility.

[Continue reading...](#)

#### **13.04.21 - While waiting for an appeal against the harsh sentence, Aleksandr Ivshin visited five pre-trial detention centers in 1.5 months and fell seriously ill**

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/04/14.html>

Aleksandr Ivshin, 63, is awaiting an appeal against the harsh [sentence](#) for his faith. The hearing will be held by conference call from the SIZO of the city of Syzran (Samara region) on April 15, 2021. Within 2 weeks, the pensioner was transported from one pre-trial detention center to another in five regions of Russia. On the way, he fell seriously ill.

[Continue reading...](#)

#### **13.04.21 - Flagship Protestant colleges stripped of right to offer higher education**

The Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Ingria's Theological Institute lost its higher education licence on 6 April, the third flagship Protestant educational institution to lose the right to conduct formal religious education. Another Lutheran seminary is fighting against the stripping of its licence through the courts.

[Continue reading...](#)

#### **09.04.21 - Prosecution of Jehovah's Witnesses gets more brutal**

Link to full text in Russian: <https://cutt.ly/Hvx09fG>

Igor Turik, Viktor Kuchkov, Boris Burylov, Alexander Inozemtsev, and Yury Vaag are being prosecuted merely because of participation in a local congregation of believers.

On 8 April, in the debates in the Industrial district court of Perm, the prosecution side requested real prison terms for five Jehovah's Witnesses: 52-year-old Igor Turik, 80-year-old Boris Burylov, 53-year-old Viktor Kuchkov, 45-year-old Yury Vaag, and 48-year-old Alexander Inozemtsev. This has been written by Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia.

[Continue reading...](#)

#### **08.04.21 - New web project about the deportation of Jehovah's Witnesses in the Soviet Union: 3D exhibition, photos, documents, books**

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/04/11.html>

A new website about the mass confessional expulsion of Jehovah's Witnesses for the faith in the Soviet Union - "70 years of Operation North" has been launched. You will be able to visit the 3D museum, find out how and why believers were repressed, hear first-hand stories from the victims of the tragedy and get acquainted with the declassified archives of the USSR Ministry of State Security.

[Continue reading...](#)

#### **08.04.21 - An appeal filed in Birobidzhan upheld Artur Lokhvitskiy's conviction for practicing his faith - a two-and-a-half year probation**

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/04/12.html>

On April 8, 2021, the court of the Jewish Autonomous Region did not satisfy the appeal of a resident of Birobidzhan, 35-year-old Artur Lokhvitskiy, who had previously been sentenced to 2.5 years of probation for his faith. During the hearing, the judge forbade the believer to quote the Bible, threatening additional punishment.

[Continue reading...](#)

#### **08.04.21 - Court of appeals declines to soften sentence given to leader of *Aum Shinrikyo's* Russian cell**

A military appellate court has upheld the sentence handed down to Mikhail Ustyantsev, the head of the Russian cell of the community *Aum Shinrikyo* (banned in Russia), who was convicted for creating a terrorist organization on the territory of Russia.

[Continue reading...](#)

#### **07.04.21 - 70 years of Operation North - eyewitnesses and experts discuss the mass deportation of Jehovah's Witnesses in the USSR**

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/04/9.html>

"To evict forever." The government's order for the largest religious deportation in the USSR, which commenced in April of 1951, changed the lives of thousands of Jehovah's Witnesses forever. Men and women, the elderly and babies - about 10,000 individuals - were loaded onto freight trains and transported in inhumane conditions from the western regions of the country to the north without the right to return.

[Continue reading...](#)

#### **07.04.21 - Russian investigation bureau nabs four Jehovah's Witnesses**

Link to full text in Russian: <https://cutt.ly/9vx0SyH>

The investigation department for Abinsk district of the territorial department of the S.K.R. [Russian Investigative Committee] is investigating criminal cases against four local residents. They are suspected of participating in an extremist organization and enticing others into its activity. This is reported by the press service of the bureau.

[Continue reading...](#)

#### **06.04.21 - Court unmoved by appeal of elderly Jehovah's Witness**

Link to full text in Russian: <https://credo.press/236544/>

On 5 April, a Novosibirsk oblast court left unchanged the verdict of the Lenin district court of Novosibirsk regarding 67-year-old Jehovah's Witness Yury Saveliev. He was sentenced to 6 years in a penal colony of ordinary regime and now the sentence has taken legal effect, a correspondent of the portal Credo.Press reports, with reference to a source among the Russian Jehovah's Witnesses.

[Continue reading...](#)

#### **06.04.21 - A third Jehovah's Witness from the village of Kholm'skaya has been sentenced to three-year prison sentence.**

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/04/8.html>

On April 6, 2021, the judge of the Abinsky District Court of the Krasnodar Territory, Sergey Mikhin, sentenced Aleksandr Shcherbina to 3 years in a general regime colony, considering prayers and reading the Bible "the activities of an extremist organization." The verdict can be appealed, the believer insists on his innocence.

[Continue reading...](#)

#### **05.04.21 - A Novosibirsk appeal upheld 67-year-old Yuriy Savelyev's verdict: six years in prison for practicing his faith**

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/04/6.html>

On April 5, 2021, the Novosibirsk Regional Court upheld the verdict of the Leninsky District Court of Novosibirsk against the 67-year-old pensioner Yuriy Savelyev. He had been sentenced to 6 years in a general regime colony. The verdict entered into force.

[Continue reading...](#)

#### **02.04.21 - Birobidzhan-based Tatyana Zagulina was handed a two-and-a-half year probation for reading the Bible**

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/04/2.html>

On April 1, 2021, Yuliya Tsykina, judge of the Birobidzhan District Court, found Tatyana Zagulina guilty of participating in the activities of a banned organization. She was sentenced to 2 years and 6 months of suspended imprisonment and 2 years of restriction of freedom.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **01.04.21 - St. Petersburg court bans mobile app of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia**

The Oktyabrsky District Court of St. Petersburg has declared as extremist the mobile app *JW Library* of the religious organization *Jehovah's Witnesses*, banned in Russia, and prohibited its distribution in the territory of Russia, the press service for the city prosecutor's office said.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **01.04.21 - A St. Petersburg court banned a popular JW Library mobile application**

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/04/1.html>

On March 31, 2021, the Oktyabrsky District Court of St. Petersburg declared as "extremist" and banned the distribution in Russia of the religious mobile application *JW Library*, a library which contains biblical texts, audio and video materials. The court made this decision without even examining the application.

[Continue reading...](#)

---

## **Special bimonthly on freedom of religion or belief (16-31.03.2021)**

### **01.04.21 - St. Petersburg court bans mobile app of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia**

St. Petersburg, April 1, Interfax - The Oktyabrsky District Court of St. Petersburg has declared as extremist the mobile app *JW Library* of the religious organization *Jehovah's Witnesses*, banned in Russia, and prohibited its distribution in the territory of Russia, the press service for the city prosecutor's office said.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **31.03.21 - Peaceful Believer Oleg Danilov in Krasnodar territory sentenced to 3 years in prison for religious beliefs**

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/03/22.html>

On March 30, 2021, Olga Khomchenkova, judge of the Abinsky District Court of the Krasnodar Territory, announced the verdict to Jehovah's Witness Oleg Danilov: 3 years in



a general regime colony for his faith. He was found guilty of participation in the activities of an "extremist" organization.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **30.03.21 - CRIMEA: Longest jail term so far**

Of the four jail terms handed down in Crimea to punish the exercise of freedom of religion or belief, 54-year-old Jehovah's Witness Viktor Stashevsky received the longest so far. A Sevastopol court jailed him on 29 March for six and a half years, with a further seven years under restrictions, which are due to end in 2034.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **29.03.21 - In Crimea, the harshest sentence for faith in Jehovah was passed: Viktor Stashevsky was sentenced to 6 and a half years in prison**

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/03/20.html>

On March 29, 2021, the judge of the Gagarinsky District Court of Sevastopol, Pavel Kryllo, found Jehovah's Witness Viktor Stashevskiy guilty of organizing the activities of an extremist community (part 1 of Article 282.2 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation) and sentenced him to 6.5 years in a general regime colony.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **29.03.21 - Appeal in Rostov-on-Don upheld the verdict of Semyon Baybak, convicted of faith**

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/03/19.html>

On March 29, 2021, the Rostov Regional Court confirmed the sentence to Semyon Baybak in the form of 3.5 years of suspended sentence. The Rostov resident was found guilty of extremism for peaceful religious beliefs. The verdict entered into force, but it can be appealed in cassation and in international instances.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **29.03.21 - Four Jehovah's Witnesses detained in Sochi, among them a woman**

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/03/18.html>

On March 24, 2021, 4 believers were detained and placed in a temporary detention center in Sochi. Two days later, the court ruled to detain 54-year-old Vladimir Deshko and 48-year-old Tatyana Velizhanina in jail. 54-year-old Yuriy Logininskiy and 56-year-old Yuriy Moskalyov were placed under house arrest.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **24.03.21 - Dennis Christensen can now receive letters in three languages**

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/03/17.html>

On March 18, 2021, it became known that Dennis Christensen had the opportunity to receive letters also in English and Danish, in addition to Russian. Dennis is thrilled with this opportunity as he receives dozens of letters every day.

**Continue reading...**

**24.03.21 - A Komsomolsk-on-Amur prosecutor requested a six-years penal colony for believer Nikolay Aliyev**

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/03/16.html>

On March 23, 2021, during the debate in the Tsentralny District Court of Komsomolsk-on-Amur, the prosecutor asked the court to send 42-year-old [Nikolai Aliyev](#) to a general regime colony for 6 years, followed by restraint of freedom for 2 years. His only "fault" is that he professes the religion of Jehovah's Witnesses.

**Continue reading...**

**23.03.21 - A Sevastopol prosecutor is demanding a seven-year imprisonment for Viktor Stashevskiy charging him for believing in Jehovah God**

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/03/15.html>

On March 22, 2021, during the debate in the Gagarinskiy District Court of Sevastopol, the prosecutor requested a sentence of 7 years in prison for the 54-year-old Viktor Stashevskiy. On March 29, the believer will deliver the last word, after which the court can pronounce a sentence on him.

**Continue reading...**

**23.03.21 - A Rostov-on-Don appeals court upheld Galina Parkova's guilty conviction for practicing her faith**

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/03/14.html>

On March 22, 2021, the Rostov Regional Court considered the complaint of Galina Parkova against the verdict of the lower court. She asked to be found not guilty of committing a crime under the article "participation in the activities of a prohibited organization". But the appellate panel upheld the verdict.

**Continue reading...**

**22.03.21 - A Taganrog home of one of Jehovah's Witnesses, who previously served more than five years of probation for practicing his faith, was searched again**

On March 20, 2021, the police searched the home of 58-year-old Taganrog-based Aleksandr Skvortsov, having previously placed his home under audio surveillance. Approximately ten years ago, the security forces already invaded the home of this

peaceful believer. At that time, he endured exhausting court hearings and served a suspended sentence.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **16.03.21 - The Jewish Autonomous Region court confirmed Yevgeniy Golik's conviction of a two-and-a-half year probation for discussing the Bible**

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/03/10.html>

On March 16, 2021, the Court of the Jewish Autonomous Region, having considered [Evgeniy Golik's](#) appeal against the verdict of the Birobidzhan District Court, left the suspended sentence - 2.5 years - unchanged. The verdict entered into force, but can be appealed at the cassation instance.

[Continue reading...](#)

---

## **Russia intensifies persecution for reading the Bible in occupied Crimea**

By Halya Coynash

Kharkiv Human Rights Protection Group (16.03.21) - <https://bit.ly/30YxK6M> - A Russian-controlled court in Simferopol has placed 42-year-old Ukrainian **Taras Kuzio** under house arrest following mass armed searches of Jehovah's Witnesses' homes in occupied Yalta. The occupation regime has slightly varied the charge this time, although Kuzio is facing the same persecution as other believers for practising his faith.

The hearing on 12 March at the 'Kievsky District Court' took place behind closed doors, and with a lawyer appointed by the 'investigators'. Crimean Solidarity civic journalists were therefore unable to attend the hearing, but [cite their own source](#) in reporting that Kuzio is charged with 'financing an extremist organization' under Article 282.3 § 1 of Russia's criminal code. The 'court' took into account Kuzio's two underage children; his state of health and his social ties with Yalta, and ordered house arrest, rather than full detention, as demanded by the 'investigators'. Kuzio has also been ordered to have no contact with others involved in the 'case' and has been prohibited from using the Internet, sending or receiving mail.

Kuzio's family plan to appeal against the ruling.

13 armed searches [were carried out](#) on 11 March by the Investigative Committee and FSB, accompanied by Russian-controlled police and OMON [riot police] officers. Four believers were interrogated, with Kuzio detained. The searches were 'authorized' by Kievsky District Court 'judge' **Viktor Krapko**.

Although the charge is very slightly different from the usual Article 282.2 § 1 ('organizing the activity of a religious organization whose dissolution has been ordered due to extremist activities'), it is almost certainly based on the same activities. Since the shocking Supreme Court ruling from 20 April 2017, which outlawed the Jehovah's Witnesses as a supposedly 'extremist organization, believers have been persecuted in Russia and in occupied Crimea for reading the Bible in groups, taking part in shared prayers, etc.

There were also [searches on 10 February](#) at the homes of **Andriy Rogutsky** and **Lyudmila Shevchenko** with the FSB & Co. removing **Bibles**, notebooks and electronic devices.

Kuzio has been the target of Russian religious persecution since 20 March 2019 when at least [six armed searches were carried out](#) in Yalta and neighbouring Alushta. Although the renowned Memorial Human Rights Centre [reported](#) two men: Kuzio and **Artem Gerasimov** as being charged under Article 282.2 § 1 following that 'operation', the only 'trial' was of Gerasimov, and he was only under an undertaking not to leave Yalta.

Gerasimov's 'trial' was the second persecution of a Jehovah's Witness in occupied Crimea, and took place almost in parallel with the case of **Serhiy Filatov**, a father of four from Dzhankoy, who had been arrested after [the first round of armed searches](#) during the night from 15-16 November 2018.

It was probably because of [the appalling six-year sentence](#) against Filatov on 5 March 2020, that Gerasimov was initially 'only fined' despite the Russian-controlled prosecutor, **Oksana Chuchuyeva**, [having demanded](#) a six and a half year sentence. It is quite likely that the plan was to see what the western reaction was to this first prison sentence passed down by an occupying state against a person accused only of practising his faith. If that was the intention, then the reaction, or lack of it, made Russia brazen enough, on 4 June 2020, to revoke the first ruling against Gerasimov and [sentence him to six years' imprisonment](#).

Worth stressing that such FSB persecution of believers is generally accompanied by propaganda exercises on Russian-state controlled media. The latter, in reporting the March 2019 armed raids which first targeted both Gerasimov and Kuzio, [claimed](#) that the FSB had 'broken up a Jehovah's Witness cell'. [A video](#) on Vesti.Krym showed burly men in masks and military gear making their way into what is presumably Gerasimov's home and demonstrating religious material, including the Bible, as though it were 'evidence'. On 10 March 2021, a Russian Cassation Court [rejected](#) the cassation appeal brought against Filatov's sentence.

The mounting persecution of believers in Russia and occupied Crimea, and the increasingly severe sentences passed, give grounds for concern about the 'trial' in occupied Sevastopol of 54-year-old **Viktor Stashevsky** which is now coming to an end. Unfortunately, the 'judge' in that case is **Pavel Kryllo** from the Gagarin District Court, who has already been involved in the politically-motivated trial of one Ukrainian ([Ihor Movenko](#) ).

On 26 May 2020, the very same day that Filatov's 6-year sentence was upheld, armed FSB, Rosgvardia and masked OMON [riot police] officers [burst into four homes](#) in occupied Kerch on 26 May 2020, with **Artem Shabliy**, a 29-year-old father of two, arrested. The criminal proceedings are known to have been initiated by 'investigator' **Valery Zarubin** with Shabliy accused of having "drawn others into the activities of an extremist organization" by discussing the Bible with them.

The armed searches on nine Jehovah's Witness homes in Sevastopol on 1 October 2020 resulted in the arrests of four men: 51-year-old **Yevhen Zhukov**; **Volodymyr Maladyka** (57); **Volodymyr Sakada** (50) and **Ihor Schmidt** (48) All of them were remanded in custody the following day and remain imprisoned to this day.

Photo : Investigative Committee image with men forcing their way into a home, although in none of these cases has anybody shown resistance, Taras Kuzio, photo probably from 2019

---

## **Special bimonthly on freedom of religion or belief (01-15.03.2021)**

### **15.03.21 - Russian repression of religious minorities promoted in Paris**

The notorious Alexander Dvorkin and some of his friends claimed they are those who are persecuted—by the U.S. and Bitter Winter.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **15.03.21 - The Court of the Jewish autonomous region confirmed the conviction of Yevgeniy Golik: 2.5 years of probation for talking about the Bible**

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/03/9.html>

On March 15, 2021, the judge of the Nadezhdinsky District Court of the Primorsky Territory, Diana Merzlyakova, considered the participation of 77-year-old Vladimir Filippov in peaceful religious services as extremism and sentenced him to 6 years of probation with a probationary period of 4 years and restriction of freedom for 1 year.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **12.03.21 - A Chelyabinsk court sentenced 73-year-old Valentina Suvorova, a past award recipient for dedication to her profession, to a two-year probation for reading the Bible**

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/03/8.html>

CLARIFICATION. On March 11, 2021, the Metallurgicheskiy District Court of Chelyabinsk labeled Valentina Suvorova's, a retiree, activities as extremist because she "sang songs" and "prayed to Jehovah God." The believer was given a two-year suspended sentence with additional restrictions on certain activities for a period of six months and a one-year probationary period (initially it was reported that the believer was given a one-year suspended sentence).

[Continue reading...](#)

### **12.03.21 - Jewish Autonomous Region court upholds Anastasiya Sycheva's suspended sentence for participating in Jehovah's Witnesses worship services**

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/03/6.html>

On March 11, 2021, the court of the Jewish Autonomous Region upheld the conditional sentence of 43-year-old Anastasia Sycheva from Obluchye. The verdict entered into force. The believer insists on her innocence. She has the right to appeal against the verdict in cassation, as well as in international instances.

[Continue reading...](#)

**11.03.21 - Kursk court rules that Jehovah's Witness from Denmark illegally placed in solitary confinement**

Kursk, March 11, Interfax - A Kursk Region Court has upheld a decision determining that Danish citizen Dennis Christensen, who was convicted in a case involving organization of the activities of the *Jehovah's Witnesses* organization (recognized as extremist and banned in Russia), was placed in solitary confinement illegally, the court press service said.

[Continue reading...](#)

**11.01.21 - A wave of searches in homes of believers in Yalta. A new criminal case was initiated**

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/03/7.html>

On March 11, 2021, one more series of searches took place in Yalta in at least 9 homes of Jehovah's Witnesses. Four people were detained for interrogation, one of them was taken by the security forces to Simferopol.

[Continue reading...](#)

**11.03.21 - A sixth criminal case in the Amur Region. FSB searches 12 Belogorsk-based believers**

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/03/5.html>

On the morning of March 4, 2021, groups of security officials conducted searches at 6 addresses in the city of Belogorsk (Amur Region). 12 believers were taken to the local FSB department and later released. A criminal case was initiated for extremist activity based on religion.

[Continue reading...](#)

**10.03.21 - A State prosecutor requested an unprecedented sentence for Jehovah's Witnesses from Volgograd — nine years in prison for practicing one's faith**

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/03/4.html>

On March 9, 2021, during the debate in the criminal case against four Jehovah's Witnesses in Volgograd, assistant prosecutor Anna Myagkova requested 9 years in a general regime colony for Valery Rogozin and Denis Peresunko, and 7 years for Igor Yegozaryan and Sergey Melnik.

[Continue reading...](#)

**05.03.21 - A Nizhny Novgorod court sentenced Sergey Verkhoturov to six years of suspended sentence for reading the Bible**



Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/03/3.html>

On March 5, 2021, Denis Kiselyov, a Prioksky District Court judge, found Sergey Verkhoturov guilty of organizing the activities of a banned organization and sentenced him to a six-year suspended sentence with a four-year probationary period. The believer is insisting he is completely innocent.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **03.03.21 - Moscow, the old believers in defence of Jehovah's Witnesses**

The schismatic 17th century community defends "the inalienable right" for the outlawed religious group, even if "they do not share doctrine and ideas". The Old Believers have suffered past "destruction of churches, confiscation of sanctuaries", with "exile and imprisonment, torture and the death penalty". The repression of freedom of conscience raises tensions, conflicts and divisions in society.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **03.03.21 - Putin orders Interior Ministry to prosecute provocateurs, suppress all manifestations of extremism**

Moscow, March 3, Interfax - Russian President Vladimir Putin has ordered the Interior Ministry to resolutely suppress all manifestations of extremism and to prosecute provocateurs who incite people to commit unlawful acts.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **March 21 - Situation review of human rights in 2021**

The monitoring review was prepared by the Crimean Human Rights Group on the Basis of materials collected in February 2021.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **03.03.21 - Homes of Jehovah's Witnesses were searched in Syktyvkar. Three believers are now behind bars**

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/03/1.html>

On the morning of March 2, 2021, at least 14 families of local believers were searched in Syktyvkar. Four men were detained and placed in a temporary detention center. One of them, 59-year-old Sergei Ushakhin, was later released on recognizance not to leave. The rest are awaiting a court decision as they are prevented.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **02.03.21 - A Rostov-on-Don appeal upheld the conviction of believer Ruslan Alyyev**

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/03/2.html>

On March 1, 2021, the Rostov Regional Court upheld the sentence against Ruslan Alyev. The court of appeal recognized him as a member of a banned organization. The believer will be imprisoned for 2.5 years conditionally.

[Continue reading...](#)

---

## **Deteriorating religious freedom situation denounced at the OSCE**

***Speech delivered by Chargé d’Affaires Courtney Austrian to the Permanent Council, Vienna: [US Mission to the OSCE \(04.03.2021\)](#)/ Excerpt***

“In recent months, the Kremlin intensified its efforts to suppress independent voices and viewpoints, including those of members of civil society organizations, human rights defenders, independent journalists, political opposition members, and believers belonging to religious minority communities. With each repressive action, Russia’s authorities demonstrate an abiding contempt for their international legal obligations and OSCE commitments to respect human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Wielding overly broad “anti-extremism” and “anti-terrorism” laws as political weapons, authorities continue to raid, arrest, and prosecute peaceful believers, including members of certain Muslim groups and Jehovah’s Witnesses. On February 24, a Russian court handed down a two-year prison sentence to 69-year-old Valentina Baranovskaya—the first time a court has consigned a female Jehovah’s Witness to a prison term. Her son, Roman Baranovsky, received a six-year sentence.

According to credible reports, Russia now imprisons 51 Jehovah’s Witnesses, and the human rights group *Memorial* currently recognizes 298 individuals in Russia as prisoners held due to their religious beliefs.”

***[Speech delivered by UK Ambassador Neil Bush at the OSCE Permanent Council \(04.03.2021\)](#)/ Excerpt***

“(…) We must also highlight - unfortunately not for the first time - the concerning situation of Jehovah’s Witnesses in the Russian Federation. The 2017 ruling of the Russian Supreme Court, 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.

Since that 2017 ruling, we have witnessed an increasing number of detentions, criminal investigations and prosecutions of Jehovah’s Witnesses across Russia, including the arrest and sentencing of Valentina Baranovskaya and Roman Baranovskiy on 24 February, and the sentencing of Aleksandr Ivshin on 10 February. Such cases reinforce the impression of an organised campaign of persecution against Jehovah’s Witnesses.”

## Other recent statements from the U.S. this year:

February 25, [Ned Price, State Dept Spokesperson](#)

February 24, [USCIRF Commissioner Bauer](#)

February 11, [Ned Price, State Dept Spokesperson](#)

---

## Special bimonthly on freedom of religion or belief (16-28.02.2021)

### 26.02.21 - Defrocked priest Sergy's pretrial detention extended until end of spring

The Basmanny District Court of Moscow has agreed on a three-month extension of the pretrial arrest of ex-priest Sergy Romanov, charged with several crimes, including inducement to suicide.

"The court has granted the investigator's petition. Nikolay Romanov's measure of restraint in the form of remand has been extended until May 28, 2021," court spokesperson Irina Sofinskaya told *Interfax*

[Continue reading...](#)

### 26.02.21 - More than 50 Jehovah's Witnesses are imprisoned - an anti-record of persecution for practicing one's faith

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/02/17.html>

By February 25, 2021, the number of Jehovah's Witnesses simultaneously placed in Russian [colonies and pre-trial detention centers](#) reached 51. In just 3.5 years after the decision of the Supreme Court to liquidate 396 legal entities of this religion, 230 people in the country went through places of imprisonment.

[Continue reading...](#)

### 26.02.21 - The Kostroma Court of Appeals commuted Sergey and Valeriya Rayman's strict sentence

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/02/18.html>

On February 26, 2021, the Kostroma Regional Court, having considered the appeal of the Rayman spouses, canceled the longest suspended sentence for faith - 8 and 7 years. Earlier, a lower court found Sergey and Valeriya guilty of organizing and participating in extremist activities.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **25.02.21 - CRIMEA: Muslim meetings for worship main target of "anti-missionary" prosecutions**

Of the 13 individuals fined under Russia's "anti-missionary" laws in 2020 in Russian-occupied Crimea, 10 were imams leading meetings for worship in mosques outside the framework of the Russian-backed Crimean Muslim Board. "What will the state's next step be?"

[Continue reading...](#)

### **25.02.21 - The case of six Jehovah's Witnesses from Orenburg is back in court**

Link to full text in Russian:

[www.sova-center.ru/misuse/news/persecution/2021/02/d43729/](http://www.sova-center.ru/misuse/news/persecution/2021/02/d43729/)

A court in Orenburg will begin reviewing in March the case of six Jehovah's Witnesses that had previously been returned to the prosecutor. In February 2021 the case of six Jehovah's Witnesses was resubmitted to the Industrial District Court of Orenburg. The first court session was scheduled for March 1.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **24.02.21 - New cases against Jehovah's Witnesses initiated in Birobidzhan**

Link to full text in Russian: [www.sova-center.ru/misuse/news/persecution/2021/02/d43717/](http://www.sova-center.ru/misuse/news/persecution/2021/02/d43717/)

One year after the case against Jehovah's Witness Postnikov was opened, his wife was also persecuted.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **24.02.21 - Series of searches in homes of Jehovah's Witnesses in Vladimir region**

Link to full text in Russian: [www.sova-center.ru/misuse/news/persecution/2021/02/d43702/](http://www.sova-center.ru/misuse/news/persecution/2021/02/d43702/)

On February 19, 2021, it became known that a series of searches took place in the homes of Jehovah's Witnesses followers in Kovrov, Vladimir region.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **24.02.21 - A 70-year-old Khakasia-based woman was sentenced to two years in a penal colony for practicing her faith. Her son was sentenced to six years in a penal colony. They are Jehovah's Witnesses**

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/02/16.html>

On February 24, 2021, Abakan city court passed an unprecedentedly cruel sentence: for the first time a woman, who is also elderly, was sentenced to imprisonment. For the first

time, a person is imprisoned under the milder part of article 282.2 (participation in a banned organization) of the RF Criminal Code. This is the case of Valentina Baranovskaya.

[Continue reading...](#)

**24.02.21 - Homes of two Jehovah's Witnesses in Razdolnoye, a Crimean village, were searched. A religious book was planted in the home of a 72-year-old believer**

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/02/15.html>

On February 10, 2021, in the village of Razdolnoye (Razdolnensky District, Crimea), security forces examined the homes of two local Jehovah's Witnesses: Andrey Rogutskiy and Lyudmila Shevchenko. Bibles, notebooks, electronic devices were confiscated from believers.

[Continue reading...](#)

**24.02.21 - The Russian Foreign Ministry claims that Jehovah's Witnesses have the right to practice their religion in groups. Why then are there dozens of believers that are imprisoned?**

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/02/14.html>

"Members of a liquidated organization may worship independently, including as part of religious groups that do not require registration..." the Russian Foreign Ministry response, dated 20 February 2021, reads.

[Continue reading...](#)

**19.02.21 - Vladimir region siloviki join in religious persecution. A series of searches took place in Kovrov**

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/02/13.html>

On February 17, 2021, believers from the Kovrov city reported searches that had taken place at least at 6 addresses. 14 people were detained and taken away for interrogation, including elderly ones. Details are being clarified.

[Continue reading...](#)

**17.02.21 - RUSSIA: Early release applications denied**

Six Jehovah's Witnesses jailed on "extremism"-related charges applied for early release after serving half their jail terms, but have been unsuccessful. Prison administrations opposed the applications with what Jehovah's Witnesses describe as "fabricated evidence" of violations of prison rules.

[Continue reading...](#)

## **16.02.21 - New searches of Jehovah's Witnesses in the Kemerovo region. A 53-year-old believer was detained; the court will be deciding which restrictions to place on him**

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/02/9.html>

On Sunday, February 14, 2021, at least six Jehovah's Witnesses were searched in the city of Belovo (Kemerovo region). Sergey Ananin, 53, was detained and taken to a temporary detention center.

[Continue reading...](#)

---

## **Early release applications denied**

***Six Jehovah's Witnesses jailed on "extremism"-related charges applied for early release after serving half their jail terms, but have been unsuccessful. Prison administrations opposed the applications with what Jehovah's Witnesses describe as "fabricated evidence" of violations of prison rules. Four of the prisoners were accused of smoking in the wrong place, but Jehovah's Witnesses do not smoke. Another Jehovah's Witness jailed since 2018 and a Muslim reader of Nursi's works jailed since 2017 should both become eligible to apply in summer 2021.***

By Victoria Arnold

Forum18 (17.02.2021) - <https://bit.ly/3azFq51> - Six Jehovah's Witnesses jailed on "extremism"-related charges for exercising their right to freedom of religion or belief have so far failed in their applications for early release. On the fourth attempt, a court commuted the rest of Dennis Christensen's jail term to a fine, but this was overturned after prosecutors appealed and he remains in jail. Four jailed Jehovah's Witnesses from Saratov have similarly failed in their appeals for early release, while a fifth is still awaiting a hearing.

Prison administrations opposed the applications with what Jehovah's Witnesses describe as "fabricated evidence" of violations of prison rules. In the Saratov case, four of the prisoners were accused of breaking prison rules by smoking in the wrong place, but Jehovah's Witnesses do not smoke at all (see below).

Both prosecutors and prison authorities opposed early release in the case of one of the Saratov five, Konstantin Bazhenov, as they claimed he had not been "reformed", but "continues to study, believe, and spread the ideology of Jehovah's Witnesses", a Jehovah's Witness spokesperson told Forum 18 (see below).

Forum 18 asked the administration of Kursk Region Labour Camp ("Correctional Colony") No.3 in Lgov, where Christensen is being held why, he is considered to have violated prison protocol, and why he is considered so dangerous that he must remain jailed. It refused to comment, citing the law on personal privacy. Kursk Region Prosecutor's Office insisted to Forum 18 that Christensen "repeatedly violated the established routine [of the labour camp]" and had been punished for this (see below).

Forum 18 asked the administration of Ulyanovsk Region Labour Camp No. 3 in Dimitrovgrad, where Bazhenov is being held, why Jehovah's Witness beliefs are grounds for refusing early release when it is the activities of legal entities which were banned, not the Jehovah's Witness religion. Forum 18 received no reply (see below).



Forum 18 asked the administration of Orenburg Region Labour Camp No. 1 in the city of Orenburg, where the other four Jehovah's Witnesses from Saratov are being held, how they broke prison regulations, why they were considered so dangerous that they should be behind bars, and why it had claimed in court that they had been smoking when this is forbidden by their beliefs. Forum 18 received no reply (see below).

Between June 2017 and July 2018, six Muslims who met to study the works of the late Turkish theologian Said Nursi have received prison sentences on "extremism"-related charges, of whom one – Ilgar Aliyev - is still in prison. None is known to have applied for early release, but Aliyev should be eligible to apply for early release in April 2021 (see below).

Once a court has rejected an appeal for early release, a prisoner must wait a further six months before lodging a further application (see below).

All the more than 60 Jehovah's Witnesses brought to criminal trial on "extremism"-related charges since the 2017 nationwide ban have been convicted, with several being jailed. Appeals have not overturned any convictions. In a few cases, appeal courts increased or reduced the punishment. Muslims who met to read the works of Said Nursi similarly convicted on "extremism"-related charges have also tended to be unsuccessful at appeal.

### **Early release**

According to Article 80 of the Criminal Code, people serving jail sentences have the right (after a certain period of time) to apply to be released early and serve a lesser punishment instead of their remaining terms of imprisonment.

The more serious the offence for which a person has been convicted, the longer they must stay imprisoned before applying for a change of punishment. Jehovah's Witnesses and Muslim readers of Nursi's works tend to be prosecuted under Criminal Code Article 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").

Under this Article, a prisoner may request to be released after serving half their term, as long as they spend at least six months imprisoned. This period is calculated from the day a person is first detained (which is often long before trial), not from when the sentence comes into force.

Six Jehovah's Witnesses have applied for early release, but with no success, largely because prison administrations refused to support them. Between June 2017 and July 2018, six Muslim men were jailed for periods of between two and eight years for meeting together to study Nursi's works. None is known to have applied for early release.

At present, only one Muslim reader of Nursi's works remains imprisoned – Ilgar Vagifogly Aliyev. A Dagestan court sentenced him to eight years' imprisonment in May 2018. He was first detained in April 2017; if he decides to request that the remainder of his sentence be replaced with a lesser punishment, he could therefore do so in April 2021 (see below).

Whether inmates in general manage to get early release "all depends on the particular prison", Jehovah's Witness spokesperson Yaroslav Sivulsky commented to Forum 18 on 3 February. "But usually prisons are in no rush to get rid of cheap labour too quickly." He

believes that Jehovah's Witnesses are being treated differently, noting that Konstantin Bazhenov (see below) was not released despite positive character references from members of the prison staff.

### ***Christensen: Early release application denied***

Danish citizen Dennis Ole Christensen (born 18 December 1972) was sentenced to six years' imprisonment on 6 February 2019. Taking into account time spent in pre-trial detention, he was due to serve about a further three years. Prosecutors accused him 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 June 2016, before the nationwide ban.

On 23 June 2020, Lgov District Court (Kursk Region) decided that Christensen's remaining prison sentence should be commuted to a fine of 400,000 Roubles. This was the first time a court changed a Jehovah's Witness prisoner's remaining jail term to a non-custodial punishment. Christensen had previously applied for early release three times, but had been turned down during the application process.

Prosecutors, despite originally supporting Christensen's application, then appealed against the court decision. On 4 September 2020, Kursk Regional Court sent the matter back for re-examination. On 26 October 2020, the district court ruled that Christensen should not be released, and Kursk Regional Court upheld this decision on 10 February 2021. He may submit a new application only after six months have passed.

Both prosecutors and the prison administration opposed early release, Jehovah's Witness spokesperson Yaroslav Sivulsky told Forum 18 on 15 January 2021, though the prosecutor initially supported it in court. The prison authorities presented "fabricated evidence" of Christensen breaking prison rules – for example, by communicating with people in other cells, which he denies – leading to his being labelled a "malicious violator of prison protocol", Sivulsky stated.

On 22 January, Forum 18 asked the administration of Labour Camp No. 3 in Lgov why Christensen is considered to have violated prison protocol, and why he is considered so dangerous that he must remain jailed. Aleksandr Budantsev, acting head of Kursk Region Prison Service, replied on 1 February that he could not answer the first question because of the Federal Law on Personal Information (which protects individuals' privacy). He noted that a decision on reducing punishment is taken by a court and is not within the competence of the prison administration.

On 25 January, Forum 18 asked Kursk Region Prosecutor's Office why it had first supported and then opposed Christensen's application for early release. In his reply of 9 February, Aleksey Shatunov of the Prosecutor's Office for Overseeing Compliance with the Law in Correctional Institutions did not answer this question. He explained that prosecutors had challenged Lgov District Court's original decision of 23 June 2020 because of "the discrepancy between the court's conclusions, outlined in the ruling, and the actual circumstances [of the case] established during the hearing". He added that Christensen "repeatedly violated the established routine [of the labour camp]" and had been punished for this.

### ***Saratov Jehovah's Witnesses: Four early release applications denied, one still awaiting hearing***

Konstantin Viktorovich Bazhenov (born 10 May 1975) was convicted alongside five other Jehovah's Witnesses in Saratov in September 2019. They were the first Jehovah's

Witnesses to be imprisoned after the 2017 Supreme Court ban on Jehovah's Witness activity.

All six received prison terms ranging from two to three and half years. After unsuccessful appeals at Saratov Regional Court on 20 December 2019, prison authorities sent five of the men to Orenburg's Labour Camp No. 1. Prison guards [tortured the five men on arrival at the Labour Camp](#), and contrary to international law [no suspect prison guards have been arrested, investigated or put on criminal trial for torture](#).

The prison authorities sent Bazhenov to Labour Camp No. 3 in Dimitrovgrad (Ulyanovsk Region).

Interior Ministry officials [deprived Bazhenov of Russian citizenship in April 2020](#).

Bazhenov's request for early release was [unsuccessful on 28 October 2020 at Dimitrovgrad City Court](#) (Ulyanovsk Region). He appealed, also unsuccessfully, at Ulyanovsk Regional Court on 16 December 2020. He cannot now try again until June 2021, but is due to be released on 5 July. It is likely that Bazhenov will be [expelled to Ukraine on his release](#).

Both prosecutors and prison authorities opposed early release in Bazhenov's case as they claimed he had not been "reformed", but "continues to study, believe, and spread the ideology of Jehovah's Witnesses", Jehovah's Witness spokesperson Sivulsky told Forum 18.

He added that "Bazhenov has done everything he can to cooperate with the prison administration".

Forum 18 asked the administration of Labour Camp No. 3 in Dimitrovgrad on 22 January why Jehovah's Witness beliefs are grounds for refusing early release when it is the activities of legal entities which were banned, not the Jehovah's Witness religion. Forum 18 received no reply by the end of the working day on 17 February.

The other four men - Aleksey Budenchuk, Gennady German, Aleksey Miretsky and Roman Gridasov - also unsuccessfully applied for early release from Orenburg Labour Camp No. 1 and the replacement of their remaining sentences with fines. German, Gridasov and Miretsky have been unsuccessful, while Budenchuk's hearing has been postponed to an unknown date.

Prosecutors and prison authorities also opposed early release for these Jehovah's Witnesses, presenting what Jehovah's Witness spokesperson Sivulsky stated was "fabricated evidence" that the four men had all broken prison rules. For example, they were accused of smoking in the wrong place, but Jehovah's Witnesses do not smoke at all.

On 22 January, Forum 18 asked the administration of Labour Camp No. 1 in Orenburg how the Jehovah's Witnesses broke prison regulations and why they were considered so dangerous that they should be behind bars, and on 15 February, why it had claimed in court that they had been smoking when this was forbidden by their beliefs. Forum 18 received no reply by the end of the working day on 17 February.

A sixth Jehovah's Witness from Saratov - Feliks Makhammadiyev - was [stripped of Russian citizenship in April 2020](#) while serving his jail term. He did not apply for early release and completed his sentence on 31 December 2020, after which Interior Ministry officials transferred him to a foreigners' detention centre. On 21 January 2021, he

was [expelled to Uzbekistan](#), despite being married to a Russian citizen and having lived in Russia since 2002.

### **Eligible soon to apply for early release**

The one Muslim reader of Nursi's works who remains imprisoned – Ilgar Vagif-ogly Aliyev – should be eligible in April 2021 to request that the remainder of his sentence be replaced with a lesser punishment. He was first detained in April 2017. A Dagestan court [sentenced him to eight years' imprisonment in May 2018](#).

One other imprisoned Jehovah's Witness is known to be approaching the point at which he can apply to exchange his remaining term for a lesser punishment. Sergey Gennadyevich Klimov was detained in June 2018 and [sentenced to six years' imprisonment in November 2019](#). If he chooses to do so, he could request to be released in June 2021.

---

## **Appeals fail to overturn "extremism" convictions**

***All the more than 60 Jehovah's Witnesses brought to criminal trial on "extremism"-related charges since the 2017 nationwide ban have been convicted, with several being jailed. Appeals have not overturned any convictions. In a few cases, appeal courts increased or reduced the punishment. Muslims who met to read the works of Said Nursi similarly convicted on "extremism"-related charges have also tended to be unsuccessful at appeal. Raids, house searches, criminal cases, prosecutions and convictions continue.***

Forum 18 (16.02.2021) - <https://bit.ly/2Np6tqV> - Over 60 Jehovah's Witnesses have gone on trial on "extremism"-related charges since the Supreme Court's 2017 ban on Jehovah's Witness activity, and all of them have been convicted. None of the convictions has been overturned on appeal.

Muslim readers of the works of Said Nursi similarly convicted on "extremism"-related charges have also tended to be unsuccessful at appeal (see below).

On 21 January 2021, in the first known instance of a sentence being increased at appeal in Russia, Ulyanovsk Regional Court lengthened Sergey Mysin's four-year suspended sentence to a four-and-a-half year suspended sentence (see below).

On 3 August 2020, Gennady Shpakovsky's six-and-a-half-year jail term was reduced to a suspended sentence of the same length. His conviction still stands and he may yet appeal further. He is now on two years' probation. During this time, he must register with the police every two weeks, abide by a curfew from 11 pm to 6 am, and cannot leave his home town of Pskov, his wife Tatyana Shpakovskaya told Forum 18 on 28 October 2020, "but this is still better than six and a half years in a correctional colony [labour camp]" (see below).

On 16 September 2020, Vladimir Alushkin's six-year prison term was shortened to four years and changed to a suspended sentence. The United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention has criticised the arrest, detention and trial. Three other Jehovah's Witnesses are known to have had their sentences reduced on appeal (see below).

At present, only one Muslim who met with others to read Nursi's works remains imprisoned – Ilgar Aliyev. A court in Dagestan sentenced him in May 2018 to eight years

eight years' imprisonment plus two years of restrictions on freedom. In July 2018 his appeal against conviction was rejected (see below).

In October 2018 a prosecution appeal seeking to jail Andrei Dedkov was rejected. Dedkov, a Muslim who met with others to study Nursi's works, was in June 2018 fined more than six months' average local wages, and prosecutor's appealed against the fine for its "excessive leniency". Dedkov did not challenge his conviction (see below).

On 25 January 2021, a North Caucasus appeal court upheld the acquittal of Yury Zalipayev, the first time a Jehovah's Witness has been found not guilty on "extremism"-related charges in over three years. Investigators in the town of Maysky have searched the homes of Zalipayev and other Jehovah's Witnesses on several occasions since May 2020. No new charges have yet been brought against Zalipayev himself (see below).

For those sentenced to imprisonment, there is also little possibility of early release. Courts have so far turned down all applications for this.

No Muslims who were jailed for meeting with others to read Nursi's works have applied for early release. Six Jehovah's Witnesses jailed on "extremism"-related charges applied for early release after serving half their jail terms, but have been unsuccessful. Prison administrations opposed the applications with what Jehovah's Witnesses describe as "fabricated evidence" of violations of prison rules. Four of the prisoners were accused of smoking in the wrong place, but Jehovah's Witnesses do not smoke. Another Jehovah's Witness held since 2018 and sentenced in 2019, and a Muslim reader of Nursi's works held since 2017 and sentenced in 2018, should both become eligible to apply for early release in summer 2021.

### ***"Extremism"-related prosecutions***

Jehovah's Witnesses in both Russia and Russian-occupied Crimea are prosecuted for continuing to meet for prayer and Bible study 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"). Some are also charged under one or both of 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").

Muslims who meet to study the works of the late Turkish theologian Said Nursi face similar "extremism"-related criminal prosecutions and jailings. In the Russian-occupied Ukrainian territory of Crimea similar prosecutions and jailings are brought by Russian authorities against Muslims and Jehovah's Witnesses.

### ***Raids, trials, convictions continue***

Raids, house searches, and criminal cases against Muslims and Jehovah's Witnesses continue across Russia, and raids in Moscow in November 2020 included torture of those raided.

The most recent known raids were on 28 January 2021 in the Tyva Republic (where the FSB security service searched at least four homes of Jehovah's Witnesses in the town of Kyzyl and detained one man), and on 10 February in Moscow and Moscow Region (where at least 14 searches took place and two people have been detained).

The most recent known convictions for Jehovah's Witnesses for continuing to meet for prayer and Bible study are:

- 20 January, Yevgeny Anatolyevich Golik, suspended sentence of two and a half years, Birobidzhan District Court, Jewish Autonomous Region;
- 21 January, Anastasiya Nikolayevna Sychyova, suspended sentence of two years, Obluchye District Court, Jewish Autonomous Region;
- 26 January, Galina Vasilyevna Parkova, suspended sentence of two years and three months, Lenin District Court, Rostov-on-Don;
- 2 February, Artur Sergeevich Lokhvitsky, suspended sentence of two and a half years, Birobidzhan District Court, Jewish Autonomous Region;
- 10 February, Aleksandr Yevgenyevich Ivshin, seven and a half years' imprisonment, Abinsk District Court, Krasnodar Region; this is the longest jail term, yet received by a Jehovah's Witness and was imposed after only three court hearings;
- 12 February, Igor Olegovich Tsaryov, suspended sentence of two and a half years, Birobidzhan District Court, Jewish Autonomous Region;
- 12 February, Larisa Aleksandrovna Artamonova, fine of 10,000 Roubles, Birobidzhan District Court, Jewish Autonomous Region;
- 15 February, Svetlana Yakovlevna Monis, fine of 10,000 Roubles, Birobidzhan District Court, Jewish Autonomous Region;
- 16 February, Yuliya Fyodorovna Kaganovich, fine of 10,000 Roubles, Birobidzhan District Court, Jewish Autonomous Region.

The oldest person to be convicted so far is Vera Ivanovna Zolotova (born 20 October 1946), a Jehovah's Witness from Yelizovo (Primorye Region). She received a two-year suspended sentence on 25 September 2020.

Jehovah's Witness Yury Prokopyevich Savelyev (born 1 January 1954), who was sentenced to six years' imprisonment on 16 December 2020 in Novosibirsk, is the oldest person to get a jail term.

In January 2021, the oldest Jehovah's Witness to be prosecuted – Rimma Mikhailovna Vashchenko (born 17 August 1930) – died before her case could be heard in court. Investigators in Nevinnomyssk (Stavropol Region) had named her as a suspect 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").

### ***Suspended sentences, Rosfinmonitoring "List of Terrorists and Extremists"***

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.

People under investigation or facing charges are normally added to the Federal Financial Monitoring Service (Rosfinmonitoring) "List of Terrorists and Extremists", and individuals can also be added after being sentenced. Banks must freeze the accounts of individuals on the List, although small transactions (up to 10,000 Roubles) are permitted. 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.

### ***Most appeals unsuccessful***



Out of 20 cases (involving 44 people) flowing from the nationwide ban on Jehovah's Witnesses, and which had gone to appeal by 8 February 2021, two were sent for re-examination and judges reduced sentences in four cases. Courts upheld the remaining 14 guilty verdicts.

Prosecutors may also challenge sentences they think are too lenient. Their challenges rarely succeed, but in one Jehovah's Witness case a punishment was increased.

Between June 2017 and July 2018, six Muslim men were jailed by courts (in Dagestan, Novosibirsk, and Amur Region) 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 ("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"). Five appealed, but none was successful.

Typically, such Muslims meet in 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.

At present, only one Muslim who met with others to read Nursi's works remains imprisoned – Ilgar Vagif-ogly Aliyev (born 16 February 1977). A court in Dagestan sentenced him in May 2018 to eight years' imprisonment plus two years of restrictions on freedom for alleged involvement in "Nurdzhular", an organisation Muslims deny exists.

On 25 July 2018, the Supreme Court of the Republic of Dagestan rejected his appeal.

On 19 June 2017, Yevgeny Lvovich Kim (born 5 October 1974) was jailed for three years, nine months in Blagoveshchensk for meeting with other Muslims to study theologian Nursi's works.

He appealed against the conviction. On 24 August, at Amur Regional Court, Judge Yury Melnichenko upheld the conviction and labour camp sentence, but overturned the restrictions on freedom which were to have been imposed for a year after Kim's release.

Kim was released on 10 April 2019, but Interior Ministry officials had stripped him of his Russian citizenship and made him stateless in January 2019. Kim himself was unaware of this until the day before his release. He is still held in a detention centre for foreign nationals and stateless persons after being ordered deported. Multiple court appeals have failed, and Kim's request for documentation which would allow him to leave Russia legally for a third country has gone unanswered.

### ***Sentence increased***

In the first known instance of a sentence being increased at appeal in Russia, Ulyanovsk Regional Court lengthened Sergey Aleksandrovich Mysin's (born 21 June 1965) four-year suspended sentence to four-and-a-half years on 21 January 2021. The Regional Court reversed the first-instance court's decision to reduce his charge from Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 1 to Part 2.

Zasviyazhsky District Court in Ulyanovsk imposed Mysin's original four-year sentence on 8 October 2020. At the sentencing stage, the Judge reclassified the charge he faced from Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 1 ("Organisation of") to 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 District Court found the original charge of "Organisation" (Part 1) to be unproven, Jehovah's Witness spokesperson Yaroslav Sivulsky explained to Forum 18 on 12 February. It then decided to convict Mysin under Part 2 ("Participation") as he did not deny that he was a Jehovah's Witness and had taken part in meetings for worship. The Regional Court "did not agree with this conclusion and decided that Mysin was the organiser", Sivulsky added.

Mysin was also given 10 months of restrictions on freedoms in October 2020, despite serious health concerns.

Mysin had been 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 on the incident.

Five other Jehovah's Witnesses, including Mysin's wife Natalya, were also in October 2020 convicted and sentenced alongside him. The five received suspended sentences of two-and-a-half to three years. Ulyanovsk Regional Court upheld these on appeal in January 2021.

All six also had property confiscated before the sentences, and were in May 2019 added to the Federal Financial Monitoring Service (Rosfinmonitoring) "List of Terrorists and Extremists".

### ***Jail sentence changed to suspended sentence***

On 9 June 2020, Pskov Regional Court sentenced Gennady Valerianovich Shpakovsky (born 6 October 1958) to six and a half years' imprisonment. Prosecutors claimed two jars of small donations Shpakovsky had were to finance building a "world theocratic state".

On 3 August 2020, Pskov Regional Court reduced Shpakovsky's six-and-a-half-year jail term to a suspended sentence of the same length. He was released from detention the same day, but his conviction still stands and he may yet appeal further, his lawyer Arli Chimirov told Forum 18 on 29 October 2020.

Shpakovsky is now on two years' probation. During this time, he must register with the police every two weeks, abide by a curfew from 11 pm to 6 am, and cannot leave Pskov, his wife Tatyana Shpakovskaya told Forum 18 on 28 October 2020, "but this is still better than six and a half years in a correctional colony [labour camp]"

She added that they were "very surprised" at the appeal verdict. "We didn't expect such a turn of events! The judge explained that it was because there was no reason to isolate Gennady from society."

At the time of Shpakovsky's sentencing, this was the second-longest jail term yet on "extremism"-related charges for meeting with others to pray and study beliefs. Muslim Ilgar Vagif-ogly Aliyev had received an eight-year prison term under the same Criminal Code charges on 28 May 2018 (see above).

On 10 February 2021, Abinsk District Court (Krasnodar Region) sentenced Jehovah's Witness Aleksandr Yevgenyevich Ivshin to seven and a half years, also under Part 1. The sentence has not yet entered legal force.

### ***Penza sentence reduced for one defendant out of six***

Jehovah's Witness Vladimir Aleksandrovich Alushkin (born 30 June 1964), originally sentenced to six years' imprisonment, received a four-year suspended sentence on appeal, after nine months of competing legal challenges and pandemic-related delay.

Penza's Lenin District Court convicted Alushkin and five other Jehovah's Witnesses on 13 December 2019. The other defendants (including Alushkin's wife Tatyana) all received two-year suspended sentences, which have not been changed.

The United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention has criticised the arrest, detention, and trial. In an Opinion ([A/HRC/WGAD/2019/34](#)) released in August 2019, the Working Group concluded that he "should not have been arrested and held in pre-trial detention, and no trial of Mr. Alushkin should take place".

On 25 March 2020, Penza Regional Court overturned the December 2019 ruling, the first time this had happened in a Jehovah's Witness criminal case, and sent the case back for re-examination.

The re-trial at Lenin District Court was paused on 14 May 2020 because of restrictions on court functions during the coronavirus pandemic – while these proceedings were suspended, prosecutors succeeded in having Penza Regional Court's decision overturned at the 1st Cassational Court in Saratov on 9 July 2020. The six defendants had to return to Penza Regional Court for a re-consideration of their initial appeal (while the district court re-trial was dropped).

On 16 September 2020, the Regional Court shortened and suspended Alushkin's prison term to four years, but upheld his and the others' original convictions.

According to the written verdict, seen by Forum 18, the appeal judges decided to reduce Alushkin's sentence to less than the minimum under Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 1 because the first-instance court had not taken into account "the concrete circumstances of his offence" or his personal situation (never convicted before, positive character references, ill health), "which, taken together, significantly lessen the degree of public danger".

Three other Jehovah's Witnesses are known to have had their sentences reduced on appeal:

- Valery Vasilyevich Moskalenko (born 15 April 1967) received an assigned labour sentence of two years and two months on 2 September 2019, on 5 November changed to a 500,000 Rouble fine waived because of time spent in detention;

- Mikhail Yuryevich Popov (born 25 May 1962) was fined 350,000 Roubles and Yelena Vyacheslavovna Popova (born 10 September 1963) 300,000 Roubles on 14 February 2020. Both had been arrested in July 2018 and their trial started in September 2019. On 19 May 2020, their fines were reduced on appeal from a joint total of 650,000 Roubles to a joint 500,000 Rouble fine.

### ***Prosecution appeal to turn fine into jailing failed***

In June 2018, Andrei Nikolayevich Dedkov (born 16 June 1979) was fined more than six months' average local wages. Dedkov himself did not challenge his conviction.

Prosecutors appealed against the fine for its "excessive leniency". They wanted Dedkov, a Muslim who met with others to study Nursi's works, to be jailed for five years. On 2 October 2018, Krasnoyarsk Regional Court rejected the prosecution's appeal.

## ***Prosecution appeal against acquittal fails – acquittal enters into legal force***

The first acquittal of a Jehovah's Witness on "extremism" charges in more than three years entered legal force on 25 January 2021, when the Supreme Court of the Republic of Kabardino-Balkariya refused to uphold the prosecution's appeal in the case of Yury Viktorovich Zalipayev (born 8 October 1962). Prosecutors had requested a sentence of two years' imprisonment.

On 7 October 2020, Maysky District Court had found Zalipayev not guilty of "Public calls for extremist activity" under Criminal Code Article 280, Part 1.

Zalipayev's case, in which he was accused under Criminal Code Article 280, Part 1 of "public calls for extremist activity", started in August 2016 before the 2017 ban on Jehovah's Witness activities.

The Republic's Supreme Court had to postpone the appeal hearing several times in November and December 2020 as Zalipayev and his family had developed coronavirus symptoms. They had become unwell after they had spent 12 November "in the corridors and offices of law enforcement agencies" after a search of their home, Jehovah's Witnesses stated on 27 November 2020.

Investigators in the town of Maysky have searched the homes of Zalipayev and other Jehovah's Witnesses on several occasions since May 2020. No new charges have yet been brought against Zalipayev himself, but investigators have opened two new criminal cases under Criminal Code Article 282.2 ("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"), Zalipayev's lawyer Anton Omelchenko told Forum 18 on 3 February 2021.

Nobody has yet been charged, but "nobody except the investigators knows what has been done and what will be done next", Omelchenko added. "People have been searched, their belongings confiscated. Some things have been returned. And still it is quiet."

## ***Defendants facing second prosecution***

After their first criminal convictions, some Jehovah's Witnesses have been charged for a second time for a more serious alleged "crime".

Darya Igorevna Dulova (born 10 March 2000), her mother Venera Nikolayevna Dulova (born 3 January 1961), and Aleksandr Vitalyevich Pryanikov (born 18 May 1987) were all 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").

On 27 January 2020, Karpinsk City Court handed all three suspended sentences of between one year and two and a half years.

All three appealed, and on 6 August 2020, Sverdlovsk Regional Court ruled that their case should be re-examined. The re-trial is taking place at Karpinsk City Court, with their next hearing due to take place on 16 February 2021.

In February 2020, while their appeal was still pending, the Dulovas and Pryanikov became subjects of another criminal investigation under Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 1.1 ("Inclination, recruitment, or other involvement of a person in an extremist

organisation").

Shortly after the appeal hearing in August 2020, investigators also charged Pryanikov under Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 1 and Article 150, Part 4 ("Involving a minor in a criminal group or in the commission of a serious or especially serious offence"). The latter charge relates to the children of fellow Jehovah's Witness Svetlana Sergeevna Zalyayeva (born 12 May 1975) and Zalyayeva's husband Ruslan Garaftinovich Zalyayev (born 25 October 1972). Ruslan is not a Jehovah's Witness but is still accused of participating in their activities. Investigators have also charged the Zalyayevs under Criminal Code Article 150, Part 4.

As part of the same case, investigators have also charged Pryanikov's wife Anastasiya Olegovna Pryanikova (born 5 March 1987) and the Zalyayevs under Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 1.1 and Article 282.2, Part 2.

It is unknown when this case will reach court.

This is the first time that Jehovah's Witnesses have been prosecuted under Criminal Code Article 150, Part 4 since the convictions of four people in the Black Sea port of Taganrog, firstly in July 2014, and secondly, after a re-trial in November 2015. Those defendants and other Jehovah's Witnesses had also been charged under Criminal Code Article 282.2 for "continuing the activities of a banned extremist organisation" after the liquidation as an "extremist organisation" of the Taganrog Jehovah's Witness community in September 2009.

Stanislav Viktorovich Kim (born 5 July 1968) and Nikolay Yuryevich Polevodov (born 10 February 1970), from Khabarovsk, were also the subjects of two overlapping criminal cases under different charges. They received two-year suspended sentences under Article 282.2, Part 2 in February 2020, while simultaneously being tried at a different court under Article 282.2, Part 1.

This second trial ended on 3 August 2020 when Judge Vera Pismennaya of Khabarovsk's Industrial District Court sent the case (which also involved four other Jehovah's Witnesses) back to prosecutors because of a lack of detail in the investigation. The prosecution unsuccessfully challenged this decision on 12 October 2020 at Khabarovsk Regional Court; the case has not yet been re-submitted, according to the district court website.

### ***Current appeals***

Four Jehovah's Witnesses have appeals against their criminal convictions underway:

- Valeriya Aleksandrovna Rayman, Sergey Alekseyevich Rayman – convicted on 9 October 2020 and given the longest suspended sentences yet of seven and eight years respectively; first appeal hearing on 26 January 2021, next due on 25 February 2021;
- Ruslan Ramizovich Alyyev – convicted on 17 December 2020 and given suspended sentence of two years and six months; appeal registered at Rostov Regional Court on 26 January 2021 – first hearing due on 15 February 2021;
- Semyon Olegovich Baybak – convicted on 21 December 2020 and given suspended sentence of three years and six months; appeal registered at Rostov Regional Court on 2 February 2021 – first hearing due on 1 March 2021.

### ***Unsuccessful appeals***

Unsuccessful appeals in December 2020 and January 2021 include:

- Khasan Abduvaitovich Kogut – convicted on 10 September 2020 and given suspended sentence of 2 years and 6 months by Beryozovsky City Court; appeal unsuccessful at Kemerovo Regional Court on 23 December 2020
  - Sergey Mikhailovich Ledenyov – convicted on 24 November 2020 and given suspended sentence of 2 years by Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky City Court; unsuccessful appeal on 19 January 2021 at Kamchatka Regional Court;
  - Sergey Alekseyevich Britvin and Vadim Anatolyevich Levchuk – convicted on 2 September 2020 and sentenced to 4 years' imprisonment by Beryozovsky City Court, Kemerovo Region; unsuccessful appeal on 19 January 2021 at Kemerovo Regional Court;
  - Anatoly Mikhailovich Tokarev (Article 282.2, Part 1) – convicted on 23 October 2020 and fined 500,000 Roubles by October District Court, Kirov; unsuccessful appeal on 14 January 2021, Kirov Regional Court.
- 

## **Russia plays up ties to Syrian Christians**

***Russia declares its support for the Orthodox Christian militias fighting alongside the Syrian regime, as it shows great interest in the ideological factor within its expansion and domination strategy in Syria***

Al-Monitor (16.02.2021) - <https://bit.ly/3pAON95> - ALEPPO, Syria — The Russian forces operating in Syria honored Feb. 9 two commanders of the National Defense Forces, affiliated with the Syrian regime forces, in the cities of Mahrada and Suqaylabiyah in Hama countryside, and awarded them the [Medal of Fidelity](#) to Russia.

The honoring [statement](#), which was published on Facebook by the National Defense Forces in Suqaylabiyah, stated that due to the successful implementation of special missions and a personal contribution to strengthening combat cooperation, the commander of the Russian ground forces, Gen. Dimitri Glushenkov, awarded the Second Class Loyalty Medal to Russia to the commander of the National Defense Forces in Suqaylabiyah, Nabel al-Abdulla.

Also, the Russian general paid tribute to the commander of the National Defense Forces in Mahrada, [Simon al-Wakil](#), the Syrian army's Brig. Gen. [Saleh al-Abdallah](#) and the member of parliament of the Syrian regime leading the National Defense Forces in the city of Salamiyah in Hama countryside, [Fadel Warda](#).

The ceremony came after the priest of the Russian Khmeimim military base in Latakia [visited Suqaylabiyah](#) Feb. 5 and inspected the construction works at the [Hagia Sophia Church](#), whose [foundation stone](#) was laid on [Sept. 5, 2020](#). The [priest was received](#) by Abdulla.

On Jan. 28, Wakil and Abdulla participated in the [inauguration of a monument](#) commemorating Prince [Alexander Nevsky](#) during their visit to the [Khmeimim base](#).

Russian army leaders have repeatedly visited the cities of Mahrada and [Suqaylabiyah](#) to hold meetings with the commanders of the [National Defense Forces](#) in the two cities and take part in official events. On Oct. 19, 2019, Abdulla [visited Moscow](#) to participate in the Fifth World Christian Conference in Russia.

Wakil, who is [close to Russia](#), is from the predominantly [Christian](#) city of Mahrada. He established National Defense Forces groups there in 2013 to [fight alongside](#) the regime forces against the [Free Syrian Army](#) (FSA).

He also received the Russian [Peace Medal](#) on Jan. 17 and the [Kremlin Medal](#) on Oct. 21, 2020, as his fighters participated in the battles of the northern and western countryside of Hama and Idlib.

Abdulla also enjoys [strong ties](#) with the Russian forces, as he leads an entire militia of [Christian fighters](#). He also participated in the [fighting](#) alongside the regime [against the FSA](#), and he enjoys [wide popularity](#) in Suqaylabiyah.

On July 26, 2020, Abdullah suggested the idea to build a [replica of the Hagia Sophia](#) in Syria during a meeting with a delegation from the Reconciliation Center at the Russian Khmeimim base.

According to RIA Novosti news agency, Vitaly Milonov, deputy of the Russian State Duma, said on July 17, 2020, "Orthodox Christians in Russia can [help Syria build](#) a replica of the Saint Sophia Cathedral in Suqaylabiyah."

Abdullah's decision to build the church came in [response to Turkey](#), which had converted back then the Hagia Sophia in Istanbul into a mosque, 86 years after it was converted into a museum.

The Russian interest in the two Christian areas in the countryside of Hama and the armed militias raises several questions on whether Russia seeks to build ideological alliances in Syria as it did in Iran. Besides the Russian active role in the Syrian economic and military sectors, it seems the ideological factor supports the Russian efforts to expand and stay for a longer time in Syria.

Ahmed Muhammad Hamadeh, a researcher and military analyst, told Al-Monitor, "Russia is trying to garner further support for its policy in Syria, and is supporting military organizations from an ideological standpoint. This explains the religious card and the efforts to build the Hagia Sophia Church with the support and blessing of the Russians. The Russians are insinuating that their battle alongside the Assad regime is sacred."

Military analyst and expert Abdulslam Abdulrzak told Al-Monitor, "Russia is trying to portray itself as the protector of Christians in Syria, as it seeks to win the allegiance of these [Christian] militias to have a strong position in the heart of Syria."

Mohamad Bukaie, a political science lecturer at opposition universities in the countryside of Aleppo, told Al-Monitor, "Russia is showing a remarkable interest in the Christian regions of Mahrada and Suqaylabiyah, and this is a continuation of the Western tradition in general, and the Russian tradition in particular, with regard to minorities in general and Christians in particular. This takes us back to the Kuchuk Kainarji Treaty of 1774, which Russia signed with the Ottoman Caliphate to have the right to sponsor the Orthodox Christian population living in the Ottoman countries."

Bukaie said, "Russia is aware that its ambition for a long-term presence in Syria requires the presence of favorable social environments. It also knows full well that Russia and Iran are competing over the Alawite component, but the Christian component is almost incontrovertible, as it is much closer to Russia. This is why it is important for Russia to portray itself as the protector of Christians — be it in Syria or Russia or before the West."

Political science researcher Bilal Sattouf, who lives in Azaz in the countryside of Aleppo, told Al-Monitor, "The ideological factor is part of the Russian strategy and is exemplified



by the support of the Orthodox Church and the armed Orthodox militias, as evidenced by the intensive visits and the building of a miniature version of the Hagia Sophia Church in Suqaylabiyah.”

This Russian trend can be explained based on two factors, the first one being related to the competition with the Iranian Shiite ideology in Syria, the religious factor being a top factor used to extend influence, and the second is related to breathing new life into the Russian role as a protector of the Eastern Orthodox Christians.

---

## **2 and 6 years in prison for Valentina Baranovskaya (69) and her son Roman Baranovskiy (46)**

HRWF (25.02.2021) - On 24 February, a Russian court convicted Valentina Baranovskaya (69) and her son Roman Baranovskiy (46), both Jehovah’s Witnesses) and sentenced them to two and six years in prison respectively. Valentina, who will be 70 in April, is the first female to be convicted and imprisoned in Russia since the 2017 Russian Supreme Court ruling that liquidated all of the Witnesses’ legal entities in Russia and Crimea.

**Jarrod Lopes, spokesman for Jehovah’s Witnesses**, says: “Today, Judge Elena Shcherbakova ruthlessly imprisoned a harmless, elderly woman and her son on baseless charges. The ruling was a mockery of the rule of law—both international human rights law as well as Russia’s constitution, which protects religious freedom. Numerous international human rights actors have decried Russia’s discriminatory assault of the Witnesses, which has been reminiscent of Soviet repression. Nevertheless, Russian authorities across the Federation have persisted in imprisoning and at times beating peaceful Jehovah’s Witnesses practicing their Christian beliefs. We hope that Jehovah’s Witnesses will one day be allowed to freely read the Bible and worship in Russia as they do in over 200 other lands.”

**Rachel Denber, Human Rights Watch’s deputy director of the Europe and Central Asia Division**, says: “This is a disgraceful miscarriage of justice. No one should face criminal charges, let alone an active prison sentence, for peaceful involvement in religious activities. Valentina Baranovskaya and her son, Roman Baranovskiy, have done nothing wrong, and they should be immediately freed. Russia’s authorities should stop the campaign of persecution against Jehovah’s Witnesses.”

### **Case History**

- April 10, 2019, armed law enforcement raided Valentina and Roman’s home along with three homes of Jehovah’s Witnesses in Abakan
- Officers confiscated Bibles, electronic devices, and personal records
- Hearings began July 8, 2020, at Abakan City Court (Judge, Elena Shcherbakova; State Prosecutor, Svetlana Shestakova)
- Valentina was diagnosed with a stroke July 20. Hearings subsequently postponed
- December 14, hearings resumed. Prosecutor cross examines religious scholar, Nikolai Stepanovich Volkov. Volkov describes the activities of Jehovah’s Witnesses: “They preach, naturally, the Gospel. [...] As a matter of fact, their preaching—there is nothing illegal. [...] Morally, these are ordinary, deeply decent people.”

### **Nationwide Persecution in Russia and Crimea**

- **199** criminal cases, involving **440** believers



- **52** in prison (the most since 2017 Supreme Court ruling)
- **27** under house arrest
- **1,327** homes of Witnesses raided since the 2017 Supreme Court ruling that liquidated the Witnesses' legal entities
- **39** men and women were convicted in 2020 under Article 282.2 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation (more than double the 18 convictions in 2019)
- **72** were imprisoned temporarily or due to conviction in 2020

Source: Office of Public Information, World Headquarters of Jehovah's Witnesses

Photo : Valentina and Roman Baranovskiy – Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia website

## **Bagavudin Omarov sentenced to three years in prison and released**

HRWF (25.02.2021) - On 20 February 2021, the Kirovsky District Court of Makhachkala (Dagestan) sentenced Bagavudin Omarov to three years in prison and one year of restricted freedom.

He was found guilty under Part 1 of Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation (organizing the activities of an extremist organization) for allegedly creating a cell of the At-Takfir wal-Hijra organization banned by the Supreme Court in Russia in 2010.

The court took into account the time that Omarov had already spent in custody and released him in the courtroom.

At a court hearing on 5 February, Omarov had pleaded guilty but claimed afterwards that he had incriminated himself under the threat of torture.

In his last word, he said: "As a Muslim, I professed my religion and did not realize that somehow I was breaking the law. I regret what I have done and ask you not to deprive me of my freedom, since I have a dependent family, including small children."

According to the Human Rights Centre (HRC) "Memorial", Omarov was unfoundedly accused of involvement in the "At-Takfir wal-Hijra", a radical Muslim group created in Egypt in the 1970s, when he was arrested along with ten other suspects in November 2018.

According to Memorial, the criminal case contained no objective evidence of the existence of a cell of this organization. He and other Muslims were reading and discussing books together when they were arrested. The 'participants' in the meeting had no plans and no contacts with the alleged international organization.

### **Further reading**

<https://www.sova-center.ru/religion/news/extremism/counter-extremism/2021/02/d43723/>

<https://www.eng.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/53754/>

<https://www.eng.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/52269/>

---

## **A Jehovah's Witness sentenced to 7 years 1/2 at the age of 63 years**

JW World Headquarters (10.02.2021) – On 10 February, a Russian court imposed the longest, harshest sentence—7.5 years in prison—against one of Jehovah's Witnesses, 63-year-old **Aleksandr Ivshin**. Prior to today's ruling, 6 years was the longest sentence imposed on one of Jehovah's Witnesses since the 2017 Russian Supreme Court ruling that liquidated all of the Witnesses' legal entities in Russia and Crimea. Additionally, early this morning, Russian authorities armed with machine guns raided at least 15 homes of Jehovah's Witnesses in the city of Moscow and its surrounding region. At least three men have been detained.

### ***Ivshin Case History***

- April 2020, authorities in the villages of Kholmskaya and Pavlovskaya, Krasnodar Territory, searched 9 homes of believers, including that of Aleksandr Ivshin
- Aleksandr spent 9 months under recognizance not to leave
- December 2020, the case went to court, lasting only 4 sessions under Judge Kholoshin
- Aleksandr stated during his final comments to the court: "I get the feeling that I am being tried not for extremism, but for simply continuing to profess the peaceful religion of Jehovah's Witnesses." He continued: "In my last word I want to assure you once again that throughout my life, I have not shown aggression or hatred towards anyone. People turned to me for advice and help, and this made me happy. [...] Dear court, my position in life is based on biblical principles, where there is no extremism and violence."

### ***Update on Dennis Christensen***

- Today the Kursk Regional Court denied Dennis' request for early release and to replace the remainder of his prison term with a fine. This is the second time his request for parole has been denied
- Dennis was the first Jehovah's Witness to be imprisoned following the 2017 ban
- Imprisoned since May 2017
- Currently serving a six-year sentence

### ***Nationwide Persecution (Russia and Crimea)***

- **197** criminal cases, involving **435** believers
- **42** in prison
- **27** under house arrest

- **1,296** homes of Witnesses raided since the 2017 Supreme Court ruling that liquidated the Witnesses' legal entities
- **39** men and women were convicted in 2020 under Article 282.2 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation (more than double the 18 convictions in 2019)
- **72** were imprisoned temporarily or due to conviction in 2020

Photo : jw-Russia.org - Alexander Ivshin just before his conviction.

---

## **Special Bimonthly FORB (01-15.02.2021)**

### **15.02.21 - Two of Jehovah's Witnesses detained in Moscow after February 10 raids 10 sent to detention center on the street of Verkhniye Polya**

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/02/7.html>

On 12 February 2021, Dmitry Zozulya, Judge of the Savelovsky district court of Moscow, sent the peaceful believers Aleksander Serebryakov and Yuriy Temirbulatov to jail for two months, until 10 April 2021. The men will be kept in Detention Center #7.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **14.02.21 - Russian crackdown on 'extremist' Jehovah's Witnesses snares 90-year-old former teacher**

The Christian group is being subjected to a brutal campaign that has seen believers punished for 'offences' such as discussing the Bible

[Continue reading...](#)

### **12.02.21 - Russian Jehovah's Witness handed longest 'extremism' prison sentence**

On January 28, 2021 the FSB conducted searches on believers in Kyzyl, the capital of the Tyva Republic. 41 year-old Anatoliy Senin was detained and placed in the temporary detention center. It became known that a criminal case was opened against him under an "extremist" article. In the next two days the court will decide on the question of a believer's preventive measure.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **12.02.21 - Record sentence in mounting persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia and occupied Crimea**

A Russian court has passed a 7.5 year sentence against 63-year-old pensioner **Alexander Ivshin** for reading and discussing the Bible with friends. This marks a new record in modern Russia's persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses and comes just months after a new escalation in repression against believers in occupied Crimea.

[Continue reading...](#)

**12.02.21 - The verdict has been announced for the 66th Jehovah's Witness. In Birobidzhan, the court sentenced Larisa Artamonova to a fine for her faith in God**

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/02/6.html>

On February 12, 2021, Judge Vladimir Mikhalev of the Birobidzhan District Court found Larisa Artamonova guilty under Part 2, Article 282.2 of the RF Criminal Code (participation in extremist activities). With reference to Article 64 of the Criminal Code, the court sentenced her to a fine of 10,000 rubles (\$135) with payment in installments for 4 months.

[Continue reading...](#)

**11.02.2021 - Two Jehovah's Witnesses are detained in Moscow and a criminal case for practicing their faith is initiated. Some believers are reporting beatings**

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/02/4.html>

After a wave of searches that took place in Moscow and the Moscow region on February 10, 2021, 43-year-old Aleksandr Serebryakov and 43-year-old Yuriy Temirbulatov were detained. On February 12, 2021, the Savelovsky District Court of Moscow is scheduled to select a deterrence measure for the two men.

[Continue reading...](#)

**10.02.21 - An unprecedentedly harsh sentence for a 63-year-old witness from the village of Kholmskaya: a seven-and-a-half year imprisonment for practicing faith**

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/02/3.html>

On February 10, 2021, Aleksandr Kholoshin, judge of the Abinsk district court of Krasnodar region, pronounced the sentence on Aleksandr Ivshin, who was accused by local law enforcement officials of organizing the activities of a banned organization (part 1 of article 282.2 of the RF Criminal Code). The believer was taken into custody in the courtroom. He will be kept in pre-trial detention until the sentence is enforced.

[Continue reading...](#)

**02.02.21 - A Birobidzhan court handed a sentence for believing in God. Artur Lokhvitskiy received a two-and-a-half-year suspended sentence**

Link to full text in Russian : <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/02/2.html>

On February 2, 2021, Olga Klyuchikova, judge of the Birobidzhan district court of the Jewish Autonomous Region, sentenced 35-year-old Artur Lokhvitskiy to 2 years and 6 months in prison conditionally with a 3-year probation period and the obligation to report to the police once a month. The sentence has not come into force.

[Continue reading...](#)

## **01.02.21 - A Khakassia prosecutor requests a record-breaking eight-year prison sentence for Roman Baranovskiy for practicing his faith and a five-year sentence for his mother**

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/02/1.html>

On February 1, 2021, during a debate in the Abakan City Court, the prosecutor asked to sentence 46-year-old Roman Baranovsky to 8 years in prison and a year of restraint of freedom. For his 69-year-old mother, Valentina Baranovskaya, who suffered a stroke, the prosecutor requested 5 years in prison with the same restriction.

[Continue reading...](#)

---

## **The policy of expelling 'extremists and terrorists'**

***After serving sentences as "extremists" for meeting to study and worship, three former prisoners of conscience face expulsion. One was deported, one may be expelled later in 2021, and one remains in detention as he is now stateless and no country has agreed to take him. "I think that the authorities – that is, de facto, the security services – perceive this measure not as an additional punishment, but as a way to get rid of the problem," says Aleksandr Verkhovsky.***

By Victoria Arnold,

Forum 18 (29.01.2021) - <https://bit.ly/3pghEPL> - Three people – two Jehovah's Witnesses and one Muslim - convicted as "extremists" for exercising their freedom of religion and belief have also suffered the deprivation of their Russian citizenship and the prospect of being forced to leave their homes. After already serving prison sentences for meeting to study their beliefs and for worship, one has been deported, one may be expelled later in 2021, and one remains in detention as he is now stateless and no country has yet agreed to take him in.

Jehovah's Witness Feliks Makhammadiyev was deported to Uzbekistan on 21 January, despite living in Russia since 2002. "We've tried to look at Feliks' expulsion from Russia without negative emotions," Yevgeniya Lagunova, Makhammadiyev's wife, commented to Forum 18 on 22 January. "Of course, it hurts, parting with family, with everything familiar in the country. I was born here, Feliks has spent most of his life here, here we started a family."

Another Jehovah's Witness, Konstantin Bazhenov, is likely to be deported to Ukraine later this year when his prison sentence is over (see below).

Bazhenov and Makhammadiyev, who were convicted together in Saratov in September 2019, were among the first Jehovah's Witnesses to be imprisoned after the 2017 Supreme Court ban on Jehovah's Witness activity. Interior Ministry officials deprived both men of Russian citizenship in April 2020.

Forum 18 asked Interior Ministry officials in Orenburg and Ulyanovsk Regions (responsible for overseeing Makhammadiyev's and Bazhenov's deportations) why the

men were being expelled from the country they consider their home because of the authorities' attitude to their religion. Forum 18 has received no response to this question (see below).

Muslim Yevgeny Kim, who similarly lost his Russian citizenship after his conviction for studying the works of theologian Said Nursi, remains in limbo in a detention centre for foreign nationals nearly two years after completing his prison sentence. Kim, who was rendered stateless, was ordered deported to his birthplace of Uzbekistan – but Uzbekistan has refused to accept him as he has never held citizenship there. Multiple court appeals have failed, and Kim's request for documentation which would allow him to leave Russia legally for a third country has gone unanswered (see below).

Both Makhammadiyev and Kim were tortured, but contrary to binding international human rights obligations none of the suspect torturers have been arrested and put on criminal trial for torture (see below).

### **"The policy of expelling 'extremists and terrorists'"**

"The policy of expelling 'extremists and terrorists' by depriving them of their previously acquired citizenship was laid down in [the Yarovaya package \[of anti-terrorism legislation in 2016\]](#). Then, thanks to the strongest resistance, it was possible to remove this norm as anti-constitutional in essence," Aleksandr Verkhovsky of the Moscow-based SOVA Center for Information and Analysis told Forum 18 on 28 January.

The mechanism became law, however, with [amendments to the Citizenship Law](#) in 2017.

"I think that the authorities – that is, de facto, the security services – perceive this measure not as an additional punishment, but as a way to get rid of the problem," Verkhovsky commented to Forum 18, adding that it is "undoubtedly" a federal-level measure. "There are not many people to whom this norm applies, but they will keep getting caught up in it, and in most cases they will be successfully expelled."

### **Continuing raids, prosecutions, jailings**

The authorities carried out [at least 86 house searches](#) – usually involving armed officials – between late October and mid-December 2020 across 16 regions of Russia. Raids, investigations, and criminal prosecutions continue against Jehovah's Witnesses and Muslims suspected of carrying on the activities of banned "extremist" organisations, with [some raids including torture](#).

The most recent known raids on Jehovah's Witness homes were in Tambov Region in late December 2020, and in the Udmurt Republic on 21 January 2021. Three Muslims who [met with others to study Islam with the writings of Said Nursi are known to be under criminal investigation in Tatarstan and Dagestan](#).

Eight Jehovah's Witnesses and one Muslim Nursi reader are [serving labour camp terms](#) as "extremists".

Many other Jehovah's Witnesses are currently serving suspended sentences. Three have been convicted since the start of 2021. 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.

### **Deprivation of citizenship: one Jehovah's Witness expelled**

Feliks Khasanovich Makhammadiyev (born 14 December 1984) is now free after a total of 844 days behind bars – but has been deported to Uzbekistan, where he has not lived since 2002. He arrived in Uzbekistan's capital Tashkent by train in the evening of 21 January 2021, having been accompanied by police to the Russian border with Kazakhstan. His wife, Yevgeniya Lagunova (a Russian citizen), had travelled ahead by plane to meet him.

Uzbekistan is a [serious violator of freedom of religion and belief](#) and other human rights.

Makhammadiyev, like Konstantin Bazhenov, was [among the first Jehovah's Witnesses to be jailed after the 2017 Supreme Court ban on Jehovah's Witness activity](#).

Makhammadiyev was [convicted on 19 September 2019 at Lenin District Court in Saratov](#) alongside five fellow Jehovah's Witnesses. They all received prison terms ranging from two to three and half years. After unsuccessful appeals at Saratov Regional Court on 20 December 2019, prison authorities sent five of the men to Orenburg's Labour Camp No. 1, and Konstantin Viktorovich Bazhenov (see below) to Labour Camp No. 3 in Dimitrovgrad (Ulyanovsk Region).

### **Impunity for torturers continues**

Prison guards [tortured Makhammadiyev and four other Jehovah's Witnesses from Saratov](#) when they arrived at Orenburg's Labour Camp No. 1 in February 2020. As a direct result Makhammadiyev had to undergo surgery and had a drain inserted to drain fluid from his lung. Tests showed that he also suffered a broken rib and a damaged kidney. 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".

Against binding international human rights obligations, [no officials suspected of the torture of Muslim Yevgeny Kim and the four Jehovah's Witnesses have been arrested or put on criminal trial for torture](#). Such impunity for officials who torture [continues](#).

Orenburg Deputy Regional Prosecutor Andrey Vyazikov told Forum 18 [on 26 February 2020](#) 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.

The local Investigative Committee refused on 30 December 2020 to open a criminal case against the suspect torturers of the five Jehovah's Witnesses, a spokesperson for Orenburg Region Prosecutor's Office told Forum 18 on 12 January 2021. Orenburg's Central District Prosecutor's Office overturned the December decision on 11 January 2021, but no final decision on prosecution has yet been made.

### **Stripped of Russian citizenship**

Feliks 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.

Makhammadiyev renounced Uzbek citizenship in 2008, when he became a Russian citizen. Russian law requires anyone applying for Russian citizenship to attest that they will give up any other citizenship they hold. This does not appear to be strictly enforced.

The processing of such renunciation on the Uzbek side can be long and complicated, however, and requires ultimate approval from the President. It appears that this was



never concluded in Makhammadiyev's case, meaning that he has not become stateless. Uzbekistan has therefore accepted him as a national.

Interior Ministry officials in Saratov Region [stripped Makhammadiyev of his Russian citizenship in April 2020](#), as a direct consequence of his conviction for continuing to meet for prayer and Bible study after the ban on Jehovah's Witness activity.

On 30 September 2020 at Saratov's Kirov District Court, Jehovah's Witness lawyers unsuccessfully sought to have the actions of the Saratov Region branch of the Interior Ministry (as the agency which granted and annulled Makhammadiyev's citizenship) ruled unlawful and its decision overturned. An unsuccessful appeal took place at Saratov Regional Court on 13 November 2020.

### **"A new stage of trials of separation and uncertainty"**

On 31 December 2020, Makhammadiyev was released from Orenburg's Labour Camp No. 1 on completion of his sentence (3 years, reduced by time spent in pre-trial custody). He was taken to a temporary detention centre for foreign nationals and stateless persons in the village of Alabaytal, over 100 kilometres (60 miles) away.

"At the [labour camp] exit, they were waiting for Feliks," his wife Yevgeniya Lagunova told Forum 18 on 22 January 2021. "As well as police officers, there were representatives of the security services. They allowed Feliks to talk to me for a few minutes. When I was allowed to approach Feliks, he and I were as if in a dream. We hugged, asked each other quickly 'How are you?', then the happy moment of meeting ended, and there began a new stage of trials of separation and uncertainty."

The Department for Migration Issues at the Orenburg Region branch of the Interior Ministry set an internal deadline of 20 January for deporting Makhammadiyev, Jehovah's Witness spokesperson Yaroslav Sivulsky told Forum 18 on 15 January.

Uzbekistan's consulate in Kazan issued a certificate of return on the grounds that Makhammadiyev was still considered an Uzbek national. He is now beginning the process of obtaining a new Uzbek passport and documents, his wife told Forum 18 on 22 January.

### **"Of course, it hurts, parting with family, with everything familiar in the country"**

Makhammadiyev is prohibited from re-entering Russia for eight years, until 2028, his wife told Forum 18. Forum 18 wrote to the Orenburg Region Interior Ministry before the start of the working day of 20 January 2021 to ask whether Makhammadiyev would be permitted to visit Russia and whether there is any way for him to regain permission to live in the country. Aleksey Ovsiyannikov, head of the information and public relations department, replied on 27 January that he could not answer these questions because of the Federal Law on Personal Data.

"We tried to look at Feliks' expulsion from Russia without negative emotions," Yevgeniya Lagunova commented to Forum 18. "Of course, it hurts, parting with family, with everything familiar in the country. I was born here, Feliks has spent most of his life here, here we started a family."

### **Deprivation of citizenship: another Jehovah's Witness to be expelled this summer?**

Officials also stripped Konstantin Viktorovich Bazhenov (born 10 May 1975) [of his Russian citizenship in April 2020](#), as a direct consequence of his [September 2019](#)

[conviction for organising meetings for prayer and Bible study](#) after the ban on Jehovah's Witness activity.

Bazhenov received the longest sentence of the six defendants from Saratov – three and half years' imprisonment. Taking into account time spent in detention during the investigation and trial and before the verdict came into force, he is due to be released on 5 July 2021.

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). He did not give up his Ukrainian citizenship to do so.

On 23 September 2020 at October District Court in Belgorod, Jehovah's Witness lawyers unsuccessfully sought to have the actions of the Belgorod Region branch of the Interior Ministry (as the agency which granted and annulled Bazhenov's citizenship) ruled unlawful and its decision overturned. They challenged the ruling, also unsuccessfully, on 7 November 2020 at Belgorod Regional Court.

Bazhenov does not have a valid Ukrainian passport, Jehovah's Witness spokesperson Yaroslav Sivulsky told Forum 18 on 15 January 2021. Like Makhammadiyev, Bazhenov is therefore likely to be sent to a detention centre for foreign nationals before his deportation to Ukraine. If this happens, Sivulsky added, Jehovah's Witness lawyers will file an appeal against his detention.

Forum 18 wrote to the Ulyanovsk Region branch of the Interior Ministry on 19 January to ask whether Bazhenov will be detained upon release, whether there is any way he can legally stay in Russia as a Ukrainian citizen, and why he may be expelled from the country he considers his home because of the authorities' attitude to his faith. Forum 18 had received no reply as of 29 January.

No other Jehovah's Witnesses are known to have been deprived of citizenship.

### **Deprivation of citizenship: Muslim still in detention nearly two years after sentence ended**

Yevgeny Lvovich Kim (born 5 October 1974) was sentenced in June 2017 to [three years and nine months' imprisonment for organising meetings to study Islam](#) with the works of the 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 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.

Against binding international human rights obligations, [no officials accused of torture of individuals detained for exercising freedom of religion or belief have been arrested](#) or put on criminal trial for torture. Officials continue to torture with impunity, most recently [during November 2020 raids on Jehovah's Witness homes in Moscow](#).

Kim was released on 10 April 2019, but [Interior Ministry officials in Sverdlovsk Region \(where Kim received his Russian passport in 2005\) had stripped him of his Russian citizenship](#) and made him stateless in January 2019. Kim himself was unaware of this until the day before his release.

On the day he completed his prison term he was 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 have been the first time anyone was stripped of citizenship after being convicted under [Russia's "anti-extremism" laws](#) for exercising the right to freedom of religion or belief.

Verkhovsky of the SOVA Center notes that Kim's case is confirmation that there is a national policy of depriving certain convicts of their Russian nationality: "If it were the local authorities deciding the issue, they would hardly be satisfied with such a solution, in fact, as his being kept indefinitely in the detention centre for foreign nationals, with accompanying lawsuits. But they are carrying out a common directive from above."

[Kim remains in a detention centre for foreign nationals and stateless persons](#) in Khabarovsk, more than a year and nine months after he was ordered deported to his birthplace of Uzbekistan, a country whose citizenship he has never held and which has therefore refused to accept him.

According to the Khabarovsk Regional Court appeal verdict of 29 September 2020, Kim's lawyer Lyubov Tatarets (who has represented him in all Khabarovsk legal proceedings) has approached several countries to ask if they would allow Kim to travel there. Like Uzbekistan, South Korea refused to accept Kim (who is of ethnic Korean heritage). Ukraine, where he lived for some time, did not reply to Tatarets. The Turkish Foreign Ministry has recommended that Kim personally submit a request for legal status in Turkey.

Because Kim is stateless, there is technically no country to which he can be deported, and so his deportation, as ordered by Khabarovsk's Railway District Court in April 2019, cannot be carried out.

### **ECtHR and Russian Constitutional Court rulings on stateless persons**

In July 2014, the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) in Strasbourg ruled that [Russia had violated the human rights of detained stateless persons](#) under the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms by: the maintenance of inhuman conditions of detention; extended detention without the prospect of expulsion; and by denying detainees the right to appeal. The ECtHR ruled that Russia must ensure that these violations do not occur again and that it must ensure court oversight of the detention of stateless persons.

Citing the ECtHR judgment, on 23 May 2017 Russia's Constitutional Court [found that two Administrative Code articles, including Article 31.9 \("Time limit on fulfilment of an administrative sentence"\), were unconstitutional](#). It directed the Duma, the lower chamber of parliament, 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". This has not happened.

### **No reply to requests for documents recognising statelessness**

On 5 December 2019, Kim's lawyer Tatarets wrote to the Department for Migration Issues at the Khabarovsk Region branch of the Interior Ministry, requesting that Kim be formally recognised as a stateless person (litso bez grazhdanstva). On 11 June 2020, [Kim also wrote to the Department for Migration Issues](#) with the same request. He also asked to be given identity documents enabling him to leave Russia voluntarily for Turkey.

Neither lawyer Tatarets nor Kim has received a reply.

The Khabarovsk Region branch of the Interior Ministry has not replied to Forum 18's questions sent on 20 January asking why Kim has not yet been given papers to leave Russia, and what his situation will be in April.

## **Deadlock**

The written verdict, seen by Forum 18, from Kim's unsuccessful appeal to Khabarovsk Regional Court (decided on 29 September 2020 - see below) states that the Khabarovsk Region branch of the Interior Ministry appealed to the Main Administration for Migration Issues at the federal Interior Ministry for guidance shortly after Uzbekistan's 29 July 2019 refusal to accept Kim.

The federal Interior Ministry's reply of 29 January 2020, seen by Forum 18, recommends that Kim should attempt both to have his sudimost ([legal status as a convicted person](#)) annulled by a court, and to have the (administrative) deportation order lifted.

Kim, his lawyers, and even Khabarovsk Region bailiffs have tried various legal means to break the deadlock, so far without success – though two appeals are pending.

*– Direct appeal against Administrative Code Article 18.8 Part 1.1 conviction*

Kim also appealed directly against his [April 2019 conviction](#) 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"), which resulted in his deportation order.

His cassational appeal at the 9th Cassational Court in Vladivostok was unsuccessful on 10 June 2020. The Judge [claimed 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](#) – even though officials had not told him he had been made stateless until 9 April, the day before his release.

*- Sudimost annulment appeal*

Kim applied to Industrial District Court in Khabarovsk in an attempt to have his sudimost ([legal status as a convicted person](#)) annulled with regard to his [June 2017 conviction under Criminal Code Article 282.2 Part 1](#) (a "serious offence" with a sudimost period of six years after serving one's sentence). The sudimost associated with Criminal Code Article 282, Part 1 (a "medium-severity offence" with a sudimost period of three years) had already expired.

Criminal Code Article 282, Part 1 punishes "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". Criminal Code Article 282.2 Part 1 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".

Industrial District Court refused Kim's request on 28 October 2020. He appealed unsuccessfully on 29 December 2020 at Khabarovsk Regional Court. Khabarovsk Regional Court Judge Aleksandra Savvateyeva noted in her verdict of 29 September 2020 (therefore before the hearing at Industrial District Court) that, should Kim manage to

have his sudimost annulled and present evidence that he would be accepted in Turkey, then he could appeal to court again to challenge his detention.

*- Bailiffs' request*

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.

On 6 May 2020 Bailiff Svetlana Fedyanina, of Khabarovsk Region Interdistrict Department of Bailiffs for the Fulfilment of Special Enforcement Proceedings, wrote to Railway District Court asking it to halt the fulfilment of the deportation order. The letter, seen by Forum 18, notes that "to deport Kim to the Republic of Uzbekistan is impossible, as he is not a citizen [of that country]", and gives as the basis for the request the 23 May 2017 Constitutional Court ruling. The bailiffs withdrew their request when Kim made his own similar appeal to the court.

On 20 August 2020, Khabarovsk Region Interdistrict Department of Bailiffs for the Fulfilment of Special Enforcement Proceedings [wrote again to Railway District Court](#) asking it to halt the fulfilment of the deportation order. The court refused.

*- 9th Cassational Court appeal: attempt to end detention, halt deportation order, and compel officials to issue documents*

On 27 October 2020, the Institute for Law and Public Policy also lodged a cassational appeal at the 9th Cassational Court in Vladivostok against lower courts' refusal to uphold an administrative suit against the Khabarovsk Region branch of the Interior Ministry. It is unknown when this appeal might be considered.

The suit challenged Kim's continued detention and requested the court to halt the deportation order and compel the Interior Ministry to issue documentation authorising Kim's presence in Russia.

Railway District Court in Khabarovsk twice rejected the suit without consideration (on 13 April and 24 August 2020), before eventually hearing and refusing it on 11 September 2020.

Kim's lawyer Lyubov Tatarets made an unsuccessful appeal at Khabarovsk Regional Court on 29 September 2020. Both the district and regional courts concluded that Kim's lack of Uzbek citizenship "does not preclude the possibility of his expulsion from the Russian Federation", and therefore "is not in itself grounds for his release from the [detention centre]."

The lower courts "simply ignored the position of the Constitutional Court" in an earlier deportation case, Aleksandr Maltsev, director of legal practice at the Moscow-based Institute for Law and Public Policy, who has taken up Kim's case, told Forum 18 on 25 January 2021.

"Let's see if the cassational court will listen to senior colleagues," Maltsev added. "It is saddening that the case has not been considered within the two-month period stipulated by law. The 9th Cassational Court has requested the file from Khabarovsk for examination; the decision [to consider the appeal] has not yet been made."

*- Constitutional Court appeal*

On 10 November 2020, the Institute for Law and Public Policy lodged an appeal on Kim's behalf at Russia's Constitutional Court. The appeal questioned 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.

Immediately after he was released from prison on 10 April 2019, Kim was taken to court under Article 18.8 Part 1.1, fined 3000 Roubles, and ordered to be detained until he could be expelled from the country.

Expulsion (administrativnoye vydvoreniye) is technically different from deportation (deportatsiya), as it is punishment for an administrative offence imposed by a court ruling. Deportatsiya is decided on by the migration authorities or the FSB security service's border service. The two concepts also differ procedurally.

The Constitutional Court is currently checking that Kim's appeal conforms to technical requirements [prinyatiye k proizvodstvu]. "This does not guarantee that it will be admitted for consideration on its merits [prinyatiye k rassmotreniyu]", Aleksandr Maltsev of the Institute for Law and Public Policy told Forum 18. "If the judge shares our opinion on the presence of serious constitutional-legal problems in Yevgeny's case, then the appeal will be admitted."

Maltsev added that, in 2020, the Constitutional Court considered 59 appeals (55 from citizens and four at the request of courts), but refused to admit a further 3,321 for consideration.

#### *– European Court of Human Rights*

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. What will happen to Kim in April 2021?

Administrative Code Article 31.9 ("Time limit on fulfilment of an administrative sentence") – which, as noted above, has been found to be unconstitutional - places a time limit of two years on the execution of administrative punishments. 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 at present be fulfilled.

It remains unknown what will happen on 30 April 2021, two years after the expulsion order entered legal force.

There is no actual limit of two years on holding people in a detention centre for foreign nationals and stateless persons, Aleksandr Maltsev of the Institute for Law and Public Policy noted to Forum 18.

"Previous experience with such cases indicates that stateless persons [litsa bez grazhdanstva] are kept in detention centres even beyond the limits of the two-year period. There are still no certified stateless persons in Russia, therefore the law does not give a clear answer to [the question of] what will happen to Yevgeny. There is even the possibility that he will get out after two years and they will detain him immediately (since he will still not have documents), take him to court, and send him again to the detention centre. Legislation gives law enforcement agents that possibility."



Khabarovsk Regional Court Judge Aleksandra Savvateyeva noted in her ruling of 29 September 2020 that the length of detention for people sentenced to expulsion "is determined by the time necessary to achieve enforcement of the decision .. as a result of which these persons, as a general rule, can be held in special institutions until their actual crossing of the state border".

Attempting to cross the Russian 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.

Forum 18 wrote to the press office of the Khabarovsk Region Bailiff Service and the Interdistrict Department of Bailiffs for the Fulfilment of Special Enforcement Proceedings before the start of the working day of 20 January, asking what will happen to Kim in April 2021 if he has not been deported by then. The press office replied on 21 January that only direct parties to enforcement proceedings (or their official representatives) have the right to such information.

Kim's detention centre address is:

680003, Khabarovskiy kray  
g. Khabarovsk  
ul. Repina 3  
Tsentr vremennogo sodержaniya inostrannikh grazhdan

---

## **Special Bimonthly FORB (17-31.01.2021)**

### **29.01.21 - RUSSIA: "The policy of expelling 'extremists and terrorists'"**

After serving sentences as "extremists" for meeting to study and worship, three former prisoners of conscience face expulsion. One was deported, one may be expelled later in 2021, and one remains in detention as he is now stateless and no country has agreed to take him. "I think that the authorities – that is, de facto, the security services – perceive this measure not as an additional punishment, but as a way to get rid of the problem," says Aleksandr Verkhovsky.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **29.01.21 - The Republic of Tyva became the 61st region of Russia where Jehovah's Witnesses are persecuted.**

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/01/7.html>

On January 28, 2021 the FSB conducted searches on believers in Kyzyl, the capital of the Tyva Republic. 41 year-old Anatoliy Senin was detained and placed in the temporary detention center. It became known that a criminal case was opened against him under an "extremist" article. In the next two days the court will decide on the question of a believer's preventive measure.

[Continue reading...](#)



### **26.01.21 - A sentence for discussing the Bible has been imposed in Rostov-on-Don. Galina Parkova received a two-year-three-month suspended sentence**

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/01/6.html>

On January 26, 2021, judge of the Leninsky District Court of Rostov-on-Don, Snezhana Fedorova, sentenced Galina Parkova to 2 years and 3 months on probation with the same probation period. The court considered the participation of a believer in peaceful religious meetings of Jehovah's Witnesses as extremism.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **26.01.2021 - Another criminal conviction of Jehovah's Witnesses woman**

Link to full text in Russian: <https://www.kavkaz-uzel.media/articles/359093/>

A court in Rostov-on-Don ruled that the Jehovah's Witness Galina Parkova is a member of an extremist organization and sentenced her to a suspended sentence of two years and three months imprisonment. The believer refused to admit herself to be guilty.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **25.01.21 - Jehovah's Witness triumphs in high court over prosecution**

Link to full text in Russian : <https://www.kavkaz-uzel.media/articles/359063/>

Today the Supreme Court of Kabardino-Balkaria refused to overturn the verdict of acquittal in the case of Jehovah's Witness Yury Zalipaev, contrary to the position of the prosecutor's office. Zalipaev has been granted the right to rehabilitation.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **25.01.21 - Influential church official criticizes Orthodox dissident**

Link to full text in Russian: <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=76588>

The head of the synodal Department for External Church Relations, Metropolitan Ilarion, urged Archdeacon Andrei Kuraev to repent and cease his blasphemy against the church.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **23.01.21 - Prosecutor tries to overturn victory of Jehovah's Witness in south of Russia**

Link to full text in Russian: <https://www.kavkaz-uzel.media/articles/358950/>

The Jehovah's Witness Yury Zalipaev, whose acquittal is being appealed before the Supreme Court of Kabardino-Balkaria, declared that he did not call for extremism, which the materials of the case confirm.

[Continue reading...](#)

**23.01.21 - A Jewish Autonomous Region court sentenced the 43-year-old nurse Anastasiya Sycheva to two years of suspended sentence for her belief in Jehovah's God**

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/01/3.html>

On January 21, 2021, the judge of the Obluchensky district court of the Jewish Autonomous Region, Olga Afanasyeva, found Anastasiya Sycheva a member of a forbidden organization and sentenced her to 2 years of suspended imprisonment with a 2-year probation period and 6 months of restricted freedom.

[Continue reading...](#)

**22.01.21 - Udmurtia law enforcement raided the homes and workplaces of believers. A married couple was detained**

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/01/5.html>

On January 21, 2021, law enforcement officers conducted searches in seven homes and workplaces of Votkinsk-based Jehovah's Witnesses.

[Continue reading...](#)

**22.01.21 - Feliks Makhammadiyev has been released. He was deported from Russia, and reconnected with his wife at the central railway station in Tashkent**

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/01/4.html>

After serving three years in prison for his faith, Feliks Makhammadiyev, having been deprived of Russian citizenship because of criminal prosecution, was released in the country of his birth on January 21, 2021. His wife Yevgenia, a Russian citizen, left the Russian Federation and followed him.

[Continue reading...](#)

**21.01.21 - Nineteen Jehovah's Witnesses on trial in Birobidzhan region**

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

Verdicts were announced for Jehovah's Witnesses Evgeny Golik and Anastasia Sycheva in the Jewish autonomous oblast. This was reported to OVD-Info by the press service of the European Association of Jehovah's Witnesses.

[Continue reading...](#)

**21.01.21 - Court keeps case of "Moscow Five" Jehovah's Witnesses open**

Link to full text in Russian: <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=76577>

The Presnya court of Moscow extended the period of restriction under house arrest for adherents of the movement of Jehovah's Witnesses (forbidden in the R.F.)

[Continue reading...](#)

**20.01.21 - Yevgeniy Golik, 44, of Birobidzhan was convicted for his faith. He received a two-and-half year suspended sentence**

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/01/2.html>

On January 20, 2021 Olga Klyuchikova, judge of the Birobidzhan district court of the Jewish Autonomous Region, sentenced Yevgeny Golik under part 2 of Article 282.2 of the Criminal Code (participation in the activities of an extremist association): 2.5 years of suspended sentence with a probation period of 3 years and restriction of freedom for 1 year.

[Continue reading...](#)

**18.01.21 - Devotees of forbidden organization of Jehovah's witnesses to be tried in Stavropol**

Link to full text in Russian: <https://cutt.ly/5ka1UL2>

The organizers of the activity of a local division of the religious organization of Jehovah's Witnesses of the city of Budennovsk, which is prohibited on Russian territory, will be tried. This was reported by the press service of the Neftekumsk district court.

[Continue reading...](#)

**18.01.2021 - Case of Jehovah's witnesses from Neftekimsk reaches court**

Link to full text in Russian : <https://www.sova-center.ru/religion/news/extremism/counter-extremism/2021/01/d43514/>

On 13 January, the criminal case of three Jehovah's Witnesses reached the Neftekumsk district court of Stavropol territory. They are charged under part 3, article 33, part 1, article 282.2 (arranging the activity of an extremist organization) and part 3, article 33, part 1, article 282.3 (arranging the financing of extremist activity) of the Criminal Code.

[Continue reading ...](#)

---

## **Special Bimonthly FORB (01-15.01.2021)**

**16.01.2021 - Tatarstan bans books by Said Nursi, the Islamic theologian of dialogue**

Said Nursi (1878-1960) sought a modernization of Islam through Sufism, in dialogue with science and with other religions. He also inspired Fethullah Gülen, now despised by the Turkish political leadership. The incomprehensible charge of "extremism" used to ban his works. In the past he had proposed an alliance with the patriarch of Constantinople against atheism.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **15.01.21 - What are the Court sentences for Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia?**

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/about/faq/7.html>

Since 2017, hundreds of Russian Jehovah's Witnesses have been wrongfully accused of extremism. How many sentences have they received? How many believers have been sentenced to actual imprisonment, suspended sentences, and fines? This updatable article publishes up-to-date data on victims of religious persecution in Russia.

**Continue reading...**

### **15.01.21 - Jehovah's Witness loses appeal in Kirov**

Link to full text in Russian: <https://cutt.ly/1jYzFOs>

Yesterday an appeal in the case of Anatoly Tokarev was considered in Kirov oblast court.

On 14 January, the oblast court made the decision to leave in force the verdict of the court of the first instance in the case of a Jehovah's Witness (he had been sentenced to a fine of 500,000 rubles). We note here that the organization of Jehovah's Witnesses is forbidden in the Russian Federation.

**Continue reading...**

### **14.01.21 - Anti-evangelism law enforced against Orthodox cleric**

Link to full text in Russian: <https://credo.press/235215/>

The reason for the administrative prosecution and propaganda campaign in local and federal news media against the rector of the church of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul in the village of Sovetka of Rostov oblast, a cleric of the Suzdal diocese of the RPATs [Russian Orthodox Autonomous Church].

**Continue reading...**

### **12.01.21 - The FSB in Karachay-Cherkessia tried to find facts of involvement in the activities of Jehovah's Witnesses among three residents of a mountain village**

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/01/1.html>

On January 9, 2021 in the village of Mednogorsky (Karachay-Cherkessia), the FSB conducted an investigation of at least three apartments of believers: A.S., 34, S.G., 42, and I.P., 55. One elderly woman who was present had high blood pressure due to stress. She required urgent medical assistance.

**Continue reading...**

### **11.01.21 - Russian parliament views exempting religious bodies from financial oversight**

Link to full text in Russian: <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=76502>

The State Duma Committee on the Financial Market supported the draft bill that grants banks, insurance companies, and other organizations that work with monetary funds the right not to identify the benefactors of religious organizations, but it warns of possible risks of the use of the proposed rules by extremist organizations and its requests additional materials.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **07.01.21 - Moscow patriarch sees divine hand in Turkey's actions**

Link to full text in Russian: <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=76492>

Patriarch of Moscow and all-Rus Kirill considers the recent transformation of the cathedral of Holy Wisdom (Hagia Sophia) into a mosque is providential. In his opinion, it was divine punishment of Patriarch of Constantinople Bartholomew for intensifying the schism in Ukraine.

[Continue reading...](#)

---

## **Misuse of anti-extremism legislation**

SOVA CENTER (19.01.2021) - <https://bit.ly/2XH7nkl> - Sova Center in Moscow has just published its monthly report about the misuse of the anti-extremism legislation against some religious groups.

### ***Jehovah's Witnesses***

The persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses continued in December. They are being charged with involvement in the activities of banned organizations, usually 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. In some cases, Jehovah's Witnesses are prosecuted for continuing the activities of their religious organizations, which had been banned even before 2017. We believe that these bans had no legal basis, and we regard them as manifestations of religious discrimination.

In mid-December Yuri Savelyev was sentenced in Novosibirsk to six years of imprisonment under Article 282.2 Part 1 of the Criminal Code (organizing the activities of an extremist organization) for continuing the activities of the local Jehovah's Witnesses community. He has already served about half of the appointed term in pre-trial detention.

Ruslan Alyev from Rostov-on-Don received a suspended sentence of two and a half years under Article 282.2 Part 2 of the Criminal Code (participation in the activities of an extremist organization).

In Sochi, Nikolai Kuzichkin was sentenced under Article 282.2 Part 1 of the Criminal Code to one year and one month of imprisonment, and Vyacheslav Popov – to a year and 10

months. Taking into consideration the time spent in pre-trial detention, the court exempted both of them from serving their sentences.

As we only learned in December, a criminal case was opened in late October under Article 282.2 Part 2 of the Criminal Code and Article 282.3 Part 1 of the Criminal Code (financing of extremism) against Andrei Okhrimchuk from Rostov-on-Don.

New criminal case under Article 282.2 Part 1.1 of the Criminal Code (recruitment into an extremist organization) was opened in Kabardino-Balkaria in late November. The suspects were Vadim Zalipaev and Maria Zalipaeva, residents of Maysky and relatives of Yuri Zalipaev, who had been acquitted the day before under Article 280 of the Criminal Code (public calls for extremist activity).

In Snezhinsk of the Chelyabinsk Region, Ilya Olenin became a suspect under Article 282.2 Part 2 of the Criminal Code.

In early December, Vladimir Melnik, Vladimir Piskarev and Artur Putintsev were sent to a pre-trial detention center under Article 282.2 Part 2 of the Criminal Code.

In the village of Kholmanskaya of Krasnodar Krai, Oleg Danilov and Alexander Shcherbina became defendants in a new criminal case.

It was reported in mid-December that the criminal case under Article 282.2 Part 1 of the Criminal Code was opened in Chuvashia against seven Jehovah's Witnesses (previously we only knew about the charges against Vladimir Dutkin from Cheboksary).

Sergei Kazakov, a resident of Bikin in Khabarovsk Krai, was placed into a pre-trial detention center under Article 282.2 of the Criminal Code; an unnamed woman is also a suspect in his case.

The first ever case against Jehovah's Witnesses in the Tambov Region was opened under Article 282.2 Part 1 of the Criminal Code in late December. Anton Kuzhelkov was taken into custody, and Nikolai Prokhorov remained at large.

On November 30, 2020, the Partizansky City Court of Primorsky Krai returned the case of two believers to the prosecutor; Irina Buglak and another local resident, born in 1997, whose name was not reported. Both has been charged under Article 282.2 Part 1 of the Criminal Code.

The same decision was made in Vladivostok, in the case of Dmitry Barmakin, also charged under Article 282.2 Part 1 of the Criminal Code. In September, the court returned the case of his wife Yelena to the prosecutor as well.

Meanwhile, during the trial of Vladivostok residents Valentin Osadchuk (charged under Article 282.2 Part 1 of the Criminal Code) Nadezhda Anoikina, Lyubov Galaktionova, Elena Zaischuk, Nailya Kogai, Nina Purge and Raisa Usanova (charged under Article 282.2 Part 2 of the Criminal Code) the court of appeals canceled the decision of the lower courts to return the case to the prosecutor's office, and sent the case to the court of the first instance for consideration on the merits.

## **Muslims**

It became known in December, that, in late November, the Leningrad Regional Court confirmed the verdict passed in September to Ilyasbek Toktonazarov, a citizen of the Kyrgyz Republic. He was sentenced to two years in prison under Article 282.2 Part 2 of the Criminal Code. A follower of the Tablighi Jamaat movement, Toktonazarov was charged for conducting dawah (sermon) and taelim (teaching) on the territory of a builders' camp in Kingiseppsky District. Tablighi Jamaat was banned in Russia in 2009 – in our opinion, without due justification. This religious movement is engaged in propaganda of fundamentalist Islam, but it has never been noticed in any calls for violence, and, therefore, persecution against its supporters is, in our opinion, unjustified.

As we found out in December, a court fined Radik Safiullin, Deputy Head of the Muslim Religious Association of Kostroma one thousand rubles under Article 20.29 of the Code of Administrative Offenses in early November. In September 2020, in the Kostroma mosque, he received from unidentified persons two volumes: *Excellent Explanation of 'The Criterion Between the Allies of The Merciful and the Allies of the Devil' by Ibn Taymiyyah* by Saleh bin Abdul-Aziz Al ash-Sheikh and *Ar-Raheeq Al-Makhtum (The Sealed Nectar): Biography of the Prophet* by Safi-ur-Rahman al-Mubarakpuri. Safiullin put his signature and seal of the Muslim Religious Association of Kostroma on the books, and also created a certificate stating that these publications were not on the Federal List of Extremist Materials. After that, according to the court findings, he handed the books over to the prayer room of Penal Colony No. 7.

In fact, however, these publications are included on the Federal List of Extremist Materials. We do not view the ban against as appropriate. It was recognized as extremist for promoting the superiority of one religion and nationality over others. However, the text of the book deals with the biography of the Prophet Muhammad and the events of Islam's formative era; it reflects the worldview characteristic of medieval Muslim religious literature on which the book is based. As for the explanation of Ibn Taymiyyah's book we had no opportunity to get acquainted with its contents.

Meanwhile, In Bardymsky District of Perm Krai, Chairman of the local Muslim religious organization Malik Muratov was fined 2,000 rubles under the same article. The charges were based on the fact that the Bardym cathedral mosque had publicly accessible copies of the books *The Ideal Muslim: The True Islamic Personality of the Muslim as defined in the Quran and Sunnah* by al-Hashimi and *The Gardens of the Righteous* by Al-Nawawi, recognized as extremist. In our opinion, Muratov was prosecuted inappropriately, since he has been charged for the distribution of two books that had been banned inappropriately. *The Ideal Muslim* is a set of ethical rules and rules of everyday life for devout Muslims, which, in our opinion, contains no signs of extremism, and *The Gardens of the Righteous* by Al-Nawawi is a classic collection of the 13th century hadiths, which should not be evaluated using the modern ideas about tolerance.

---

## **New restrictions in the Russian religious law: What should believers expect?**

By Olga Sibireva

ICLRS (23.12.2020) – <https://bit.ly/3nmYaI5> – In Russia, religious discrimination is often directed at new religious movements and Protestant organizations, and this trend has only intensified over the years. Increasingly strict state policies towards religious minorities are manifested, primarily, at the legislative level.

The Russian Law On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations provides basic regulations for religious life. It was adopted in 1997 and has been amended almost every year since then; many of these amendments have worsened the plight of freedom of religion and belief in Russia.

At the end of 2018, new amendments aiming to impose new restrictions on freedom of religion or belief were announced by the Ministry of Justice. The draft law was officially submitted to the State Duma (the Russian Parliament) in July 2020. The authors of these new amendments claim that the draft law will strengthen Russia's fight against religious



extremism. But what are these new provisions; what will they do; and why are they being criticized by both lay believers and experts?

The new amendments prohibit religious groups from having connections with persons suspected of financing terrorism, as well as foreign citizens and stateless persons, whose stay in Russia is recognized as undesirable or whose activities are considered extremist by Russian courts. These persons are prohibited from being leaders or members of religious organizations in Russia. This same ban constrains individuals whose bank accounts were frozen by the Russian Interdepartmental Commission on Countering the Financing of Terrorism. This Commission can freeze the funds of organizations and individuals about whom there is information implicating their involvement in terrorist activities, even when there is no legal ground to include them on the List of Terrorists and Extremists operated by the Federal Financing Monitoring Service (Rosfinmonitoring).

Previously, these norms were accepted for nonprofit organizations, but the new amendments extend these norms to religious organizations. Although fighting against terrorism is itself a legitimate, compelling government interest meant to protect human rights and public safety, the inherent vagueness of these provisions may lead to arbitrary interference into the activities of religious minorities and unpopular religious groups, masked as efforts to counter terrorism.

The amendments also complicate the reporting of religious groups: currently, a religious group is required to notify the Ministry of Justice of its activities every three years. If the amendments are adopted, religious groups will be forced to do this annually.

Also, the amendments suggest that priests and employees of religious organizations who have received spiritual education abroad should pass mandatory recertification and re-education in Russia. Finally, the amendments would change the term "member" of a religious group to "participant."

The Russian Orthodox Church is the only religious organization that has supported the new draft law. Representatives of other religious organizations consider the draft law a threat to freedom of religion and its norms as an attempt of the state to strengthen its ability to interfere with the internal activities of religious organizations. Also, according to many leaders of religious minorities, the new amendments will not help in the fight against extremism because real extremists and terrorists usually do not seek formal membership in official religious organizations.

The mandatory recertification of the persons educated abroad and the replacement of the term "member of a religious group" with "participant" have provoked the most public discussion. Religious organizations and human rights advocates see a danger in replacing the term "member of a religious group" with "participant" because believers, at least Christians, consider the concept of "church member" very important. They will continue to use this phrase even if the required word "participant" is written in the official documents of their organization or group, but this incongruity alone can create additional obstacles for exercising religious freedom, including the denial of registration for religious organizations that do not abide by such changes.

As Bishop Sergei Ryakhovsky, Chairman of the Russian Union of Christians of Evangelical Faith (Pentecostals), noted:

The sad experience of law enforcement practice ... says that law enforcement officials will not understand the details. For them, everyone who will attend the service or even a friendly tea party, where the Bible is being discussed, are participants in religious activities. If there is a person among them who has been recognized as a member of a banned extremist organization, even if he has

already served his or her sentence, then the church (or religious group) will be recognized as breaking the law.

The requirement for recertification is simply excessive. It is obvious that if religious organizations have not yet introduced such a procedure, it means that they recognize the qualifications of clergy educated outside of Russia. So, there is no reason for the state to doubt these qualifications either. For some religious organizations, it does not matter where exactly a person received spiritual education. For example, the president of the Russian Jewish Congress, Yuri Kanner, emphasized that "in Judaism, the educational institution you graduated from is not so important as the name of the rabbi who blessed you to be a rabbi."

In this situation, the state's demand for recertification and re-education of clergy constitutes interference into the internal affairs of religious organizations. The vagueness of these provisions, including the lack of rules regulating the institution which will perform recertification and the procedure of recertification, can result in the abuse of these provisions by law enforcement agencies.

Mandatory recertification also means that every foreign religious leader or priest will be required to receive confirmation of his or her education from Russian authorities, and the state will obtain broad discretion not to approve this education and, thus, prevent any undesirable priest from serving in Russia. This may result in a situation where at some point some religious organizations could have no priests at all because the main spiritual schools of their religions are located out of Russia. Buddhist organizations even sent a letter to the State Duma to explain that Russian Buddhist clergymen

have no opportunity to receive additional professional education in the Russian Federation due to the absence of religious educational organizations corresponding to their creed, registered in Russia in accordance with the Federal Law On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations.

Russian lawmakers argue that mandatory recertification would protect Russian believers from extremist preachers. But as Bishop Sergei Ryakhovsky notes, "underground preachers do not need any permits, certifications, etc." Damir Mukhetdinov, the First Deputy Chairman of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the Russian Federation, added that supporters of radical movements "are convinced opponents of the very principle of centralizing religious activity... therefore they themselves avoid serving in established and large religious structures." The vicar of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of the Mother of God in Moscow, Kirill Gorbunov, expressed the joint position of many religious minority groups: "The state should not interfere in the internal affairs of the education of clergy. As long as they do not violate the law, this should be left to the religions themselves."

Even the head of the Russian Orthodox Church's legal department, Abbess Ksenia Chernega, who is supportive of all other amendments, believes that the point about mandatory recertification should be changed. In her opinion, recertification "should be subject only to those clergymen and persons from among the religious personnel trained abroad who will begin to carry out religious and teaching activities in the country after the entry into force of the new law."

In December 2020, the State Duma adopted the draft law in the first reading; the proposals from religious organizations seemed to have made no difference in that version and were not taken into account. Sergei Gavrilov, Chairman of the Committee on Development of Civil Society, Public and Religious Organizations, promises that the amendment on recertification of clergy will be changed for the second reading. The other

amendments obviously will be approved in their current form, and the new restrictions will soon take effect.

---

---

<sup>i</sup> Chugunov, Sergey, 'High Court fixes strict requirements on evangelism', *Religiia i Pravo*, 22 December 2017, [http://www.sclj.ru/news/detail.php?SECTION\\_ID=487&ELEMENT\\_ID=7737&print=Y](http://www.sclj.ru/news/detail.php?SECTION_ID=487&ELEMENT_ID=7737&print=Y) (accessed 31 May 2018).

<sup>ii</sup> Arnold, Victoria, 'Russia: Alleged 'missionary activity' prosecutions continue', *Forum18 News Service*, 1 March 2017, [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2261](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2261) (accessed 29 May 2018).

<sup>iii</sup> Stetson, 'Russia Religion News: African Pentecostal student sentenced for illegal evangelism', *Stetson.edu*, 17 May 2018 <https://www2.stetson.edu/~psteeves/relnews/180517c.html> (accessed 29 May 2018).