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European Court of Human Rights: "Scientology Cannot Be Banned in Russia"

Judges find that arguments that Scientology is not a religion are unpersuasive, and its literature is not "extremist."

By Massimo Introvigne

Bitter Winter (17.12.2021) - <https://bit.ly/3e4gtjk> - It is becoming almost a mathematical law. Every time Russia crosses swords with Scientology at the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), Russia loses. In 2005, 2007, 2009, and 2014 the ECHR repeatedly ruled that Scientology had been recognized as a religion (until 2014) in Russia and cannot be banned nor denied registration in Russian republics or cities. This year, the ECHR [ruled against Russia](#) for its detention and harassment of a Scientologist, Vladimir Leonidovich Kuropyatnik. Scientology has won every single case at the ECHR where it has complained that its religious liberty has been infringed in Russia.

The ECHR ruling of December 14, 2021, *Church of Scientology of Moscow and Others v. Russia*, which decided together three separate complaints by Scientologists and their organizations, is however the most comprehensive examination of the issue by the Strasbourg judges to date.

The decision discusses two separate issues, whether Scientology literature can be banned as "extremist," and whether Scientology organizations can be denied registration as religious and dissolved in Russia based on the argument that Scientology is not a religion. To both questions, the ECHR answered in the negative.

On the first issues, the ECHR noted that books by L. Ron Hubbard, the founder of Scientology, were deemed "extremist" and banned on the basis of the analyses of "experts" whose credentials were as "linguist psychologists," and which exhibited obvious anti-cult prejudices. Expert reports by scholars of religion submitted by Scientology were declared not admissible.

The "experts" of the prosecution applied to Scientology a definition of "extremism" that the ECHR had already found objectionable in cases regarding the Russian Jehovah's Witnesses. These "experts" stated that any religion that claims to be superior to others and tries to convert members of other religions, incites religious dissent and hatred against other religious organizations, and is thus "extremist." Hidden in this definition is the idea that any religion that tries to convert members of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC), thus implicitly arguing that its beliefs are superior to those of the ROC, should not be allowed to operate in Russia, a theory and practice that the ECHR has [recently declared incompatible with freedom of religion](#) in two cases decided on November 23 where it ruled in favor of the ISKCON, the Hare Krishna Movement, and the Unification Church.

In fact, all religions, including the ROC, argue that their teachings are superior to those of other religions and, if the Russian definitions were applied fairly, should all be banned as "extremist" in Russia. The ECHR told Russia that freedom of religion and of expression

can be limited by national concepts of security “only on an exceptional basis and in extreme cases,” when religious literature includes “a direct or indirect call to violence or as a justification of violence, hatred or intolerance.” The ECHR did not find such violent content in Scientology literature (including when it deals with [“suppressive persons”](#)), and was skeptical about the competence of the Russian “experts” who had concluded otherwise.

Once again, Russia was lectured on the need that it should accept religious pluralism and proselytization of ROC members by other religions. Majority “religious groups, the ECHR said, cannot reasonably expect to be exempt from all criticism; they must tolerate and accept the denial by others of their religious beliefs and even the propagation by others of doctrines hostile to their faith.” As for Scientology literature, “There is no evidence before the Court that the impugned texts insulted, held up to ridicule or slandered persons outside the Scientology community; nor that they used abusive terms in respect of them or of matters regarded as sacred by them.”

Concerning the registration of Scientology organizations, the ECHR noted that until 2014 Russian courts agreed that Scientology was a religion, although one accused of “religious extremism.” Registration was denied based on technicalities, with the obvious intent to prevent Scientology from operating legally in Russia. When in 2013 Scientology asked the Justice Department for instructions how to prepare its applications for registration in a way that would avoid the technical objections raised, it was told that its violations were “irreparable,” that it would never be registered as a religious organization, and that it should voluntarily dissolve. The Church of Scientology of Moscow was then dissolved by the Moscow City Court in 2015, with the Supreme Court upholding the decision in 2016.

The ECHR noted that, while until 2014 Russian courts regarded Scientology as a religion (although one they did not like), from 2014 the Justice Department and the courts relied, in addition to expert reports declaring Scientology extremist, on a report of 2013 of the Committee of Experts on Religion of the same Justice Department, which had concluded that Scientology is not a religion. Although this is not mentioned in the ECHR decision, this so-called Committee of Experts was an active promoter of the anti-cult ideology, and the notorious anti-cultist Alexander Dvorkin was a main force in the committee.

The ECHR found the Russian attitude contradictory. “The applicant church had been officially recognized as a religious organization since 1994, the ECHR wrote, its religious nature was not challenged for several years even after initial unsuccessful attempts to re-register between 1998 and 2000s... During the entire period of its lawful existence the applicant church and individual members had never been found responsible for any criminal offence or dangerous conduct. There is no evidence that the nature of the applicant church’s activities has changed since that time. The authorities grounded their conclusion in this respect on an expert opinion prepared by an expert panel at the Justice Department. It does not seem that they took into account any alternative expert opinions, in particular, those which could be provided by the applicant church.”

The ECHR concluded that the dissolution of the Church of Scientology of Moscow was an illegitimate and “disproportionate” measure.

Russia keeps losing key cases on religious liberty against groups Dvorkin and the anti-cult movement call “cults,” including the Jehovah’s Witnesses, the Hare Krishna movement, the Unification Church, and Scientology. In 2015, Russia [passed a law](#) authorizing its non-compliance with ECHR decisions, opening a dispute with the Council of Europe that has not been settled to-date. It is, accordingly, not certain that

Russia will follow the ECHR and recognize to Scientologists their rights to religious freedom. That they are entitled to them is, however, a solemn affirmation by European judges, and one other countries should also take note of.

[Download full judgement.](#)

Photo : The Church of Scientology of Moscow. [Credits.](#)

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Special Bimonthly FORB digest (01-15.12.2021)

14.12.2021 - The court in Tatarstan partially bans the interpretation of the Koran by al-Saadi and the collections of hadiths

Link to full text (only in Russian : <https://credo.press/240127/>
(Use <https://www.deepl.com/translator> for automatic translation)

The Laishevsky District Court of the Republic of Tatarstan announced on December 9 a decision on the administrative claim of the Privolzhsky Transport Prosecutor on the recognition of six Islamic religious books as extremist materials. According to the lawyer Ruslan Nagiyev, the claim was partially satisfied.

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12.12.2021 - Zelenogorsk Court Hears Jehovah's Witness Case

Link to full text in Russian: <https://www.sova-center.ru/religion/news/extremism/counter-extremism/2021/12/d45414/>

On December 6, 2021, the Zelenogorsk City Court of the Krasnoyarsk Territory, instead of announcing the verdict to Jehovah's Witness Alexander Kabanov, accused under Part 2 of Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code (participation in the activities of an extremist organization), decided to return the case to the stage of judicial investigation. Judging by the information on the court's website, Kabanov was also charged under Art. 322.2 of the Criminal Code (fictitious registration at the place of residence or stay).

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09.12.2021 - A Court in Cherkessk sentenced Albert Batchaev to 6 years suspended for his faith in Jehovah God

Link to full text in Russian : <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/12/061551.html>

On December 6, 2021, Rustam Ataev, judge of the Cherkessk City Court of Karachay-Cherkessia, found Albert Batchaev guilty of extremism - organizing "the performance of songs from a special collection of religious teachings of Jehovah's Witnesses and prayers to Jehovah God" and sentenced him to 6 years suspended.

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09.12.2021 - In Volgograd, a follower of Tablighi Jamaat was sentenced to a real term

Link to full text in Russian: <https://www.sova-center.ru/religion/news/extremism/counter-extremism/2021/12/d45420/>

On December 2, 2021, the Sovetsky District Court of Volgograd sentenced 51-year-old local resident Mikhail Kolotilin, who was accused of involvement in the Tablighi Jamaat movement banned in Russia. He was found guilty of organizing the activities of an extremist organization (part 1 of article 282.2 of the Criminal Code) and sentenced to three years of imprisonment in a general regime colony.

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08.12.2021 - Russia proposes to declare Friday a day off for Muslims

Link to full text in Russian: <https://ria.ru/20211208/musulmane-1762696060.html>

Muslims are in favor of introducing a day off on Friday, but such decisions need to be discussed with the public, Mufti Albir Krganov, chairman of the Spiritual Assembly of Muslims of [Russia](#) (DSMR), told RIA Novosti. Earlier, the Emirati news agency WAM reported that the United Arab Emirates became the first Muslim country to refuse a Friday day off.

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8.12.2021 - Searches of Jehovah's Witnesses took place in Taganrog. A believer was detained, the measure of restraint is being chosen

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/12/081555.html>

Early in the morning on December 7, 2021, in the port city of Taganrog, searches were carried out in at least 8 houses of citizens who, according to law enforcement officers, are Jehovah's Witnesses. Detained Aleksandr Skvortsov is being prosecuted for his faith again: he was [convicted](#) in the high-profile "Case of 16".

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07.12.2021 - RUSSIA: Jailed, awaiting appeal, deported, post-prison restrictions - list

Of those given jail sentences on "extremism" charges for exercising freedom of religion or belief, 20 are serving jail terms, 12 are awaiting appeal, two have been deported after completing prison terms and 16 are under the restrictions and supervision that last many years after a prison term is completed. Two who have completed their jail terms have left Russia and are therefore no longer subject to the post-prison restrictions.

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07.12.2021 - Rostov Regional Court approved six to six and half years in prison for three of Jehovah's Witnesses. They have already served half of their sentence in pre-trial detention

Link to full text in Russian : <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/12/071458.html>

On December 6, 2021 the Rostov Regional Court examined the appeal of 69-year-old Vilen Avanesov and his son, Arsen, as well as 54-year-old Aleksandr Parkov. They are all residents of Rostov-on-Don. The panel of judges headed by Gennadiy Peschanov left the sentence of the first instance unchanged: Parkov and Arsen Avanesov were sentenced to 6.5 years of real imprisonment and Vilen Avanesov - to 6.

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06.12.2021 - At least six searches of Jehovah's Witnesses took place in the Stavropol Territory. A criminal case was brought against an 82-year-old visually impaired woman

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/12/061134.html>

On November 26, 2021 searches were conducted in the resort town of Zheleznovodsk. Officers from the FSB and the Center for Counteracting Extremism entered the homes of what they believe to be Jehovah's Witnesses. A criminal case was initiated against Zinaida Minenko, 82, and she had to sign not to leave agreement.

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04.12.2021 - Appeal Court in Birobidzhan upholds the verdict for faith of Anastasiya Guzeva

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/12/021550.html>

On December 2, 2021, the Court of the Jewish Autonomous Region, composed of the presiding judge I. P. Zhurova, as well as judges A. V. Sizova and V. G. Shabanov, upheld the sentence of Anastasiya Guzeva — 2.5 years suspended for reading the Bible and talking on religious topics.

The believer still insists on her innocence and has the right to appeal against the verdict in cassation procedure, as well as in international instances.

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03.12.2021 - Russia acts against evangelical movement with international ties

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

In Ramenskoe near Moscow police arrived at a conference of pastors of "New Generation"* protestant churches and arrested up to 200 persons. This was reported by Pastor Albert Ratkin in a video on YouTube.

The conference began on 1 December. It involved registered and unregistered religious organizations. According to Ratkin it assembled around 200 persons.

He described how in the evening of 2 December, OMON troops with automatic weapons stormed the conference and arrested all of the participants.

[Continue reading...](#)

02.12.2021 - Victoria Verkhoturova, a nurse from Nizhny Novgorod, was sentenced to 4 years probation for her faith in Jehovah

Link to full text (only in Russian): <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/11/301426.html>

On November 29, 2021, Viktor Yakovlev, judge of the Prioksky District Court of Nizhny Novgorod, sentenced 45-year-old Victoria Verkhoturova for allegedly participating in the activities of a banned organization.

The verdict has not entered into force and can be appealed. The believer insists on her complete innocence. Although there is not a single victim in the case, the prosecutor asked the court to sentence the woman to 4.5 years in a general regime colony.

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A Tablighi Jamaat Muslim sentenced to three years in a penal colony

Mikhail Kolotylin was convicted under Art. 282.2 Criminal Code for organizing Tablighi Jamaat activities in the Volgograd region.

Human Rights Without Frontiers urges the Russian authorities to release Muslim prisoners belonging to the peaceful movement of Tablighi Jamaat and to put an end to the ban on this non-violent movement.

HRWF/ SOVA Center (11.12.2021) - On December 2, 2021, the Soviet District Court of Volgograd sentenced 51-year-old local **Mikhail Kolotilin**, accused of involvement in the Tablighi Jamaat movement banned in Russia. He was found guilty of organizing the activities of an extremist organization (Part 1 of Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code) and sentenced to three years in a penal colony.

The Kolotilin case was submitted to the court in September 2021. Details of the accusation were not specified.

Earlier, in July 2020, [it was reported that](#) six suspects in the Tablighi Jamaat cell organization were detained in the Volgograd region.

The religious movement "Tablighi Jamaat" was [banned](#) in Russia in 2009, in the opinion of [SOVA Center in Moscow](#), without proper grounds. This association was engaged in the propaganda of fundamentalist Islam, but was not noticed in any calls for violence, and therefore the persecution of its supporters, in the opinion of SOVA, is unjustified.

List of Tabligh Jamaat Muslims in prison or with an unknown sentence

KAMCHYBEKOV, Islambek (6 years ½)

KOZHAMKULOV, Shakir Temishevich (6 years ½)

SUYUNDUK, Uulu Kanybek, (6 years ½)

HALMATOV, Aybek (Unknown sentence, Art 282.2, Part 2, July 7, 2021)

KALBAEV, Artyk (Unknown sentence, Art 282.2, Part 1, July 7, 2021)

KOZONOV, Altynbek (Unknown sentence, Art 282.2, Part 2, July 7, 2021)

KUSHUEV, Murzy (Unknown sentence, Art 282.2, Part 2, July 7, 2021)

MAMAZHUNUSOV, Aybek (Unknown sentence, Art 282.2, Part 1, July 7, 2021)

UULU, Asan (Correct the spelling)/ (Unknown sentence, Art 282.2, Part 2, July 7, 2021)

Note: As of 10 December the prison was still unknown as the publication of the court decision is forbidden in such cases, according to SOVA Center (Moscow).

What is Tabligh(i) Jamaat?

[HRWF Annual Report 2020](#) - Tabligh Jamaat (sometimes spelled Tablighi Jama'at) is a revivalist missionary movement within Islam that was founded in India in the early 20th century. The term means 'those who preach' and it is sometimes called the 'Society for Spreading Faith'. Adherents do not proselytise to non-Muslims. Instead their aim is to revive the faith of less devout Muslims and to follow Islamic religious practices more vigorously.

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

Tabligh Jamaat adheres to fundamentalist interpretations of Islamic doctrine and refrains from participating in political struggles. Its aim is to make Muslims more pious and to propagate Islam. It does not use or advocate for violence, and it also does not call for the overthrow of the political regime in Russia. The Moscow-based Sova Centre and other human rights groups monitoring the activities of Tabligh Jamaat in Russia have never found any evidence linking Tabligh Jamaat to terrorism or acts of violence. Nevertheless, the Russian Supreme Court banned this movement in a ruling dated 7 May 2009 based on accusations of extremism, spreading propaganda of hatred and intentions of seizing power.

The movement has grown significantly over time. It is said to have around 80 million followers in 150 countries throughout Asia, Africa and Europe^[1] but it is particularly prevalent in South and Central Asia.

In Europe its headquarters, complete with a *madrasah* (religious school), are in the UK with about 50,000 followers in Dewsbury (Yorkshire). There are also centres in London, Glasgow, Leicester, and Birmingham. In France, Tabligh Jamaat has been able to attract a significant number of Muslims of Arabian and African origin and is estimated to have about 100,000 followers. Its activity is concentrated in the larger Paris region. In Spain it operates from Barcelona among a quickly growing number of Muslim migrants.

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

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

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

Photo : Credit: Stock – Alamy

Experts disagree on expectations from Supreme Court directive

Jehovah's Witness justified by faith - Court distinguished religious confession from extremism (Kommersant)

by Aleksei Chernyshev, Anastasia Kurilova

Russia Religion News (23.11.2021) - <https://www2.stetson.edu/religious-news/211123a.html> - A court in Vladivostok for the first time issued a verdict of acquittal in a case of a Jehovah's Witness who had been accused of extremism. The decision was based on a recent clarification by the Russian Supreme Court to the effect that courts should not interpret religious practices as participation in extremist activity. Some experts are counting on verdicts of acquittal also in other, similar cases of Jehovah's Witnesses, while others are not so optimistic.

Early in the week, the Pervorechka district court of Vladivostok issued an unexpected verdict in the criminal case of Dmitry Barmakin. The man was charged with creating an extremist community (part 1 of article 282.2 of the Criminal Code of R.F.). According to

^[1] Taylor, Jenny, "Understanding and engaging with the Tabligh Jamaat," Lausanne Movement, November 2015. <https://www.lausanne.org/content/lga/2015-11/understanding-and-engaging-with-the-tablighi-jamaat>.

the account of the investigation, he supported the activity of the organization "Jehovah's Witnesses in Vladivostok." We recall that the Russian Supreme Court in 2017 ruled the legal entity "Administrative Center of Jehovah's Witnesses" to be an extremist organization, along with all of its 395 regional affiliates. "The defendant, knowing this for a certainty, regularly conducted meetings where he spread the ideology of the forbidden association, and he also ensured the organizational base for its successful existence," the investigation department of the S.K.R. [Investigative Committee of Russia] for the Primorie territory asserted.

A criminal case against Mr. Barmakin had been opened in July 2018, and he was subsequently arrested. The believer spent a year and a half in a SIZO [pretrial investigation cell] and then his measure of restriction was mitigated to a ban on certain activities. In late 2020, the Pervorechka district court returned the case to the prosecutor's office with the indication that from the text of the indictment it was impossible to establish the extremist nature of the defendant's actions. However the prosecutor's office managed to return the case to court. In the course of the debates of the parties, the state prosecutor requested for Dmitry Barmakin nine years in a penal colony. The believer himself insisted upon his innocence, maintaining that there was no extremism in his actions. Mr. Barmakin said that he merely professed the religion of the Jehovah's Witnesses, sang songs with other believers, discussed the Bible with them, and prayed.

The trial was nearing its conclusion, but on 28 October a plenum of the Russian Supreme Court issued a "substantive" directive. It clarified that in the event of a prohibition of an organization, its former members may continue individual or group conduct of religious rituals "exclusively in exercising their right to freedom of conscience and freedom of religious confession." In and of themselves, religious practices ought not to be interpreted as participation in an extremist organization.

According to the Supreme Court's explanation, courts should first establish just which specific socially harmful actions have been committed by believers and in what ways they are significant for the continuation or revival of the activity of the extremist organization.

Also, it is necessary to ascertain the motives for the conduct of these actions.

As a result, Judge Stanislav Salnikov acquitted Dmitry Barmakin because of the absence of elements of a crime. The "OVD-Info" project (listed in the register of foreign agents) quotes the verdict: ". . . conducting the religious rituals of the religion of Jehovah's Witnesses in residences or commercial premises . . . does not violate the law but is an exercise of the rights of believers to freedom of conscience and religion." An assistant to the chairman of the district court, Alexander Chukhil, told Kommersant that the acquitted man "has the right to rehabilitation." It still has been impossible to get a comment from Dmitry Barmakin and his attorneys. Kommersant's question whether the verdict of acquittal will be appealed was not answered in the territorial prosecutor's office.

The SOVA Center for News and Analysis (included in the list of foreign agents) emphasizes that the decision of the Pervorechka district court is the first one based on the directive of the plenum of the Supreme Court. A representative of the European Association of Jehovah's Witnesses, Yaroslav Sivulsky, declared to Kommersant that the decision of the judge from Vladivostok interrupted "a continuous string of guilty verdicts," and also linked the judge's decision with the directive of the plenum of the Russian Supreme Court. "In its verdict the court emphasized the very same thing that Jehovah's Witnesses have been trying to convey to the public in the course of all these years. The peaceful religious activity of Jehovah's Witnesses, in essence, cannot pose any kind of threat to society and the state. One would like to believe that this verdict is just the first of many similar decisions," Mr. Sivulsky noted.

We recall that the Memorial Rights Center (included in the register of foreign agents) has calculated that at least 576 Jehovah's Witnesses have come under criminal prosecution in Russia. Of these, 545 persons have been charged on the basis of the same article 282.2 of the Russian Federation Criminal Code as Mr. Barmakin. Thirty-five believers have already been sentenced to real prison time and 87 to suspended sentences. At least 76 persons are being held in custody in a SIZO and 31 are under house arrest. Two believers have been stripped of their citizenship in the R.F. and deported from the country.

Attorney Viktor Zhenkov, who has defended Jehovah's Witnesses in courts, told Kommersant that he and his colleagues will now be trying to use the clarification of the Supreme Court's plenum as an argument in ongoing cases.

However, the attorney doubts that it will be possible, on the basis of this document, to get a review of cases in which a decision has already been rendered.

The director of the Center for the Study of Problems of Religion and Society of the Institute of Europe of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Roman Lunkin, is confident that one should not expect widespread acquittals in the future. After all, each court will decide for itself whether to use the Supreme Court's recommendation or not. "The problem is that we still have a contradiction. The position of the authorities is as follows: we have banned only the administrative form and believers themselves may profess their religion. But for the police, any meeting of believers in an apartment is a continuation of the activity of the forbidden organization," Mr. Lunkin stressed. "And so here each policeman, prosecutor, and judge will decide for himself whether to consider that prayer meetings in apartments are individual conduct of religious rituals or a continuation of the activity of the forbidden organization." (tr. by PDS, posted 26 November 2021)

Related article:

[Trial court applies recent Supreme Court ruling in favor of Jehovah's Witness](#)

Photo: Alexander Koryakov, Kommersant

Russia acts against Evangelical movement with international ties

Omon troops break up conference of Protestant Churches in Ramenskoe and arrest up to 200 participants

[Novaya Gazeta](#) (03.12.2021) - In Ramenskoe near Moscow police arrived at a conference of pastors of "New Generation"* protestant churches and arrested up to 200 persons. This was reported by Pastor Albert Ratkin in a video on YouTube.

The conference began on 1 December. It involved registered and unregistered religious organizations. According to Ratkin it assembled around 200 persons.

He described how in the evening of 2 December, OMON troops with automatic weapons stormed the conference and arrested all of the participants.

"They laid them face down, like criminals. They beat some. . . They lay on the cold floor for 40 minutes," Ratkin quoted one of the detainees. He said the security forces collected

personal data from the detainees and fingerprinted them. They also demanded that they acknowledge that "election of new leadership was conducted" at the conference.

The pastor reported that the believers "were trying to call Latvia and Ukraine."

In August, the office of prosecutor general declared that four religious organizations, which are linked with those countries, were "undesirable in Russia." They included the New Generation International Christian Movement, the New Generation Evangelical Christian Church, the Spiritual Board of Evangelical Christians of the New Generation Ukrainian Christian Church, and the Religious Academic Institution of the New Generation International Bible College.

The reason for declaring them to be undesirable was the conduct of activity that "represents a threat to the foundations of the constitutional order and to the security of the Russian Federation."

After midnight Ratkin reported that the detainees began being released. Indictments were composed for them, but it is not known what article they were based on.

*The "New Generation" church organizations are registered in Latvia and Ukraine, but have been declared undesirable in the R.F. (tr. by PDS, posted 3 December 2021)

HRWF Comment: Novaya Gazeta got the 2021 Peace Nobel Prize

RELATED ARTICLE

[Security troops storm "New Generation" pastors' congress in Moscow suburb](#) (REN TV)

Photo:Siloviki est descendu au congrès du mouvement indésirable "Nouvelle Génération" - Ren TV

Atheist blogger accused of hate speech against the Orthodox Church wins in Strasbourg

The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) awarded the head of the Karelian Youth Human Rights Group, Maksim Efimov 10,000 euros as compensation for moral damage. In 2012, the blogger was accused of inciting religious enmity and humiliating the dignity of representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC)/ Moscow Patriarchate for the post "Karelia vs. Pops". He had been added to the Russian "list of terrorists and extremists." [Read the full judgment.](#)

[Yefimov and Youth Human Rights Group v. Russia \(nos. 12385/15 and 51619/15\)](#)

Registrar of the European Court (07.12.2021) - The applicants, Maksim Mikhaylovich Yefimov, and Youth Human Rights Group, are a Russian national and a Russian non-governmental organisation respectively. Mr Yefimov was born in 1976 and he founded Youth Human Rights Group in 2000 in Petrozavodsk (Republic of Karelia, Russia).

The case concerns the law in Russia providing that an association may be dissolved if it refuses to expel a member who has been suspected of an extremist offence.

In 2011 Mr Yefimov was charged with an extremist offence of hate speech in connection with his publication in which he criticised the influence of the Russian Orthodox Church in public life. Two years later, the Youth Human Rights Group was liquidated for failure to expel from its ranks Mr Yefimov, who had been charged with an extremism offence.

Relying on Article 10 (freedom of expression), Mr Yefimov complains of his prosecution for expressing his views. Relying on Article 11 (freedom of association) the applicants complain of the order to expel the first applicant from Youth Human Rights Group and the order to dissolve the latter.

Violation of Article 10 in respect of the first applicant

Violation of Article 11 read in the light of Article 10 in respect of both applicants

Just satisfaction:

non-pecuniary damage: EUR 10,000 to the first applicant

HRWF Comment

Efimov had posted a short note on the newspaper's website *Zero Hour* (Час Ноль), "Karelia is fed up with priests" («Карелия устала от попов»), which read as follows:

"Anti-church attitudes are on the rise in the Karelian capital. Nothing surprising about that. Thinking members of society have realised that the church is also a party in power. The Russian Orthodox Church, just like the [ruling] United Russia party, is fooling people with fairy-tales about our good life while raking in money. Total corruption, oligarchy, and the absolute power of security services are the reasons for a revival of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC). Churches in Karelia are being built with public funds while there is no money for basic needs; ROC gets day nurseries for use at a time when childcare facilities are desperately lacking. Bearded men in fancy robes – modern-day ideology instructors – have filled the television screens. They give their opinion on everything, from canalisation to modernisation. All of this makes normal people puke; unable to do anything about the clerical stranglehold, they express their attitude to the ROC's provincial officials by tagging walls in places where the Orthodox scum hangs out. 'Pay and pray', 'Christ is dead' [is written] on the walls of the Orthodox Centre in Petrozavodsk ... which once was a day nursery."

With such "an offence", many people in France, Belgium and other EU countries would be prosecuted for hate speech against the dominant religion.

More incidents and cases of "offending the feelings of believers in Russia" [here](#) in Russian and in English with the automatic translation.

Photo : Picture of Maksim Yefimov (Credit: Credo Press)

Special Bimonthly FORB digest (16-30.11.2021)

29.11.2021 - Searches of Jehovah's Witnesses were again held in the Krasnoyarsk Territory. Criminal case initiated against 55-year-old believer

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/11/291532.html>

On November 25, 2021, in Lesosibirsk (Krasnoyarsk Territory), searches were carried out in the homes of 6 believers. It became known that a criminal case was initiated against 55-year-old Valeriy Shitz under Part 1 of Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation (organization of the activities of an extremist organization).

[Continue reading...](#)

26.11.2021 - "A group of missionaries" of the Islamic community "Tablighi Jamaat" banned in the Russian Federation was convicted in Saratov

Link to full text (only in Russian : <https://credo.press/239879/>
(Use <https://www.deepl.com/translator> for automatic translation)

A court in Saratov has sentenced four active members of the local cell of the Tablighi Jamaat religious association recognized as extremist and banned in the Russian Federation, Interfax reported on November 26 (interfax.ru) with reference to the press service of the FSB for the region.

[Continue reading...](#)

26.11.2021 - The first acquittal of one of Jehovah's Witnesses under article 282.2 of the Russian Criminal Code in Vladivostok

Link to full text in Russian : <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/11/221624.html>

On 22 November 2021 in Vladivostok, following the [explanations](#) of the Plenum of the Supreme Court of the RF, an unprecedented event took place: after a continuous chain of convictions of Jehovah's Witnesses Dmitriy Barmakin was found not guilty under part 1 of article 282.2 of the RF Criminal Code and acquitted by the court with the right to rehabilitation.

[Continue reading...](#)

26.11.2021 - The appeal in Birobidzhan left unchanged the sentence for believer Yevgeniy Yegoroa

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/11/261437.html>

On November 25, 2021, the Court of the Jewish Autonomous Region dismissed the appeal of 30-year-old Yevgeniy Yegorov, the father of a young child. The sentence of the lower court—2.5 years suspended and 1 year of restriction of freedom—came into force.

[Continue reading...](#)

25.11.2021 - Lipetsk Court imposes large fines on three believers for Bible reading

Link to full text in Russian : <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/11/251459.html>

On November 24, 2021, Judge Aleksandr Ustinov found Viktor Bachurin, Aleksandr Kostrov and Artur Netreba guilty of participating in the activities of an extremist organization and imposed a fine of 500,000 rubles on each of them. The fine was

reduced to 300,000 rubles, since the believers spent almost a year in a pre-trial detention center.

[Continue reading...](#)

24.11.2021 - RUSSIA: Hare Krishna and Mikhail Frolov win their case against Russia in Strasbourg

Press Release by the Registrar of the Court (23.11.2021) – <https://bit.ly/3l6PY0h> – The applicants are the Centre of Societies for Krishna Consciousness, a religious organisation under Russian law based in Moscow, and a Russian national Mikhail Aleksandrovich Frolov.

The case concerns the applicants' attempts to challenge hostile descriptions of the Krishna movement and the refusal of permission to hold public religious events promoting the teachings of Vaishnavism.

[Continue reading...](#)

23.11.2021 - Russia loses pair of religious freedom cases at European rights court

Two fringe religious groups won cases against Russia before Europe's top rights court on Tuesday.

In two separate cases, the Strasbourg-based European Court of Human Rights found that Moscow unlawfully detained, harassed and deported members of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, colloquially referred to as Hare Krishnas, and the Unification Church.

[Continue reading...](#)

23.11.2021 - Expulsion of two Moonist missionaries condemned by Strasbourg

With this judgment, the European Court has just confirmed again that the protection of Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights does not only concern historical religions and belief systems with institutional characteristics but also newer religions, which is the case of the Church of Unification. Counter-cult, anti-cult organizations and "cult-watching" state agencies discriminating between so-called cults and religions – a stigmatizing process – should give up their argument that so-called cults are not religious or belief systems.

[Continue reading...](#)

18.11.2021 - The scandalous parish of the Kurgan false bishop is liquidated

Link to full text (only in Russian: <https://ura.news/news/1052517476>
(Use <https://www.deepl.com/translator> for automatic translation)

The court decision on the liquidation of the Kurgan Orthodox parish in honor of the Holy Trinity, founded by the "false bishop" Baruch (Tishchenkov), entered into force. The Second General Jurisdiction Court of Appeal (St. Petersburg) upheld the [position of the](#) Kurgan Regional Court.

[Continue reading...](#)

18.11.2021 - Three elders of Jehovah's Witnesses detained in Astrakhan region

Link to full text (only in Russian): <https://ria.ru/20211118/zaderzhanie-1759625229.html>

(Use <https://www.deepl.com/translator> for automatic translation)

Law enforcement officers have detained three alleged leaders of the extremist organization " [Jehovah's Witnesses](#) " * banned in the Russian Federation in the [Akhtuba region](#) and the city of Znamensk, [Astrakhan region](#) , according to the SUSK of [Russia](#) in the region.

[Continue reading...](#)

18.11.2021 - The Court in Seversk sentenced the 80-year-old widow Yelena Saveliyeva to four years of suspended sentence for talking about Jehovah God

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/11/181626.html>

On November 17, 2021, the judge of the Seversk City Court of the Tomsk Region Svetlana Chebotareva found Yelena Saveliyeva, a teacher with forty years of experience, guilty under the article on the activities of an extremist organization and sentenced her to four years of suspended sentence for talking about the Bible.

[Continue reading...](#)

15.11.2021 -Russian Supreme Court rules Jehovah's Witnesses should not be prosecuted for joint worship

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/11/151413.html>

On October 28, 2021, the Plenum of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation ruled that joint worship of Jehovah's Witnesses, their rites, and ceremonies do not constitute a crime under Article 282.2 of the Russian Criminal Code, despite the liquidation of the religion's legal entities.

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Russia hit by European Court for discriminating Krishnas, Unification Church

Groups cannot be singled out as "cults" and discriminated through anti-cult propaganda or by using administrative tools, the judges said.

by Massimo Introvigne



Hare Krishnas in Russia. Credits.

Bitter Winter (29.11.2021) - <https://bit.ly/3EIHlqB> - On November 23, 2021, Russia was severely hit twice by the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR). Once again, the ECHR stated that Russian policies against "cults" violated the European principle of freedom of religion or belief (FORB).

The first case, ***Centre of Societies for Krishna Consciousness In Russia and Frolov v. Russia***, dealt with several instances of discrimination against ISKCON, popularly known as the Hare Krishna movement, in Russia. In 2008, a Russian Orthodox priest said in an interview that ISKCON's was a "demonically oriented religion," which "profoundly affected the personality" of its followers. Up to the appeal stage, Russian courts found the statements non-discriminatory.

Also in 2008, the government of the Ulyanovsk region in cooperation with anti-cult organizations published, at taxpayers' expenses, a brochure called *Watch Out for Cults!*, which called ISKCON, together with other movements, a "totalitarian cult" and a "destructive cult." In this case too, up to the appellate stage, Russian courts refused to intervene against the brochure.

Finally, in 2013, the prefecture of the Severo-Vostochnyy District in Moscow refused to authorize an ISKCON public meeting, stating that holding the event would have been disrespectful of the religious beliefs of others (meaning the members of the majoritarian Russian Orthodox Church). In this case too, recourses to Russian courts of law failed to produce favorable results for ISKCON.

The ECHR rejected ISKCON's recourse about the priest's interview, stating that, defamatory as it was, it had been given by a private individual to a private media, and the Russian government was not responsible for it. On the other hand, the government was responsible for the brochure, which had "breached the principles of laicism and non-interference with internal affairs of a religious movement and

undermined the dignity of its followers.” The court concluded that, through the brochure, “by using derogatory language and unsubstantiated allegations for describing the applicant centre’s religious beliefs” the Russian government had violated ISKCON’s freedom of religion.

As for the public event, the ECHR recognized that it might have served the purpose of converting members of the Russian Orthodox Church to a different religion. However, the ECHR said, this cannot be forbidden. “Freedom to manifest one’s religion includes the right to try to convince one’s neighbour,” and Russia should learn to live with attempts by missionaries of other faiths who try to convert devotees of the majority religion. Of course, that nobody should try to convert members of the Russian Orthodox Church to another religion is enshrined in Russian anti-proselytization laws, and it is unlikely that Russia will comply with the ECHR ruling.

In ***Corley and Others v. Russia*** the ECHR dealt with the cases of a family from the U.S., the Corleys, and one from Japan, the Igarashis, who had moved to Russia in the 1990s with the purpose of spreading there the teachings of the Unification Church. The climate changed in the 2000s, and within the context of anti-cult campaigns against the Unification Church Mr. Corley and Mr. Igarashi had their visa revoked. Mr. Igarashi was even arrested and kept in jail in unsanitary conditions for an alleged violation of the immigration laws.

The applicants acknowledged that Russia has a right to enforce its immigration laws but insisted that they cannot be used as tools for discriminating against religions the authorities label “cults.” The ECHR found that “the Russian authorities singled out Mr Corley and Mr Igarashi for special treatment, paving the way for their precipitated departure. As there is nothing to indicate that they held any employment or position outside the Unification Church or engaged in any activities other than religious work, it concludes that the reasons for that treatment were connected with their religious work.

Seen against the State policy objective of countering the influence of foreign missionaries in Russia, the pattern of involvement of the security services in the enforced departures of members of the Unification Church from Russia suggests that those measures were taken for the purpose of repressing the exercise of their right to freedom of religion and stifling the spreading of its teaching in Russia.” This is not admissible under the European Convention on Human Rights, the ECHR said.

The ECHR sent a clear signal that Russia, or any other country, cannot single out certain religions as “cults” and prevent them from being active or proselytizing. The court also reiterated that administrative tools cannot be surreptitiously used to limit the religious liberty of groups the government does not like.

Centre of Societies for Krishna Consciousness in Russia and Frolov v. Russia (no. 37477/11)

Press Release by the Registrar of the Court (23.11.2021) - <https://bit.ly/3l6PY0h> - The applicants are the Centre of Societies for Krishna Consciousness, a religious organisation

under Russian law based in Moscow, and a Russian national Mikhail Aleksandrovich Frolov.

The case concerns the applicants' attempts to challenge hostile descriptions of the Krishna movement and the refusal of permission to hold public religious events promoting the teachings of Vaishnavism.

Relying on Article 9 (freedom of thought, conscience and religion), taken alone and in conjunction with Article 14 (prohibition of discrimination), the applicant organisation complains in particular that a brochure "Watch out for cults!" produced by the Ulyanovsk Region described the Krishna movement as a "totalitarian cult", accusing it of "psychological manipulation" and "zombification" of the youth. It alleges that such descriptions breached the regional authority's duty of neutrality and impartiality towards the Krishna movement, an officially registered religious organisation.

Mr Frolov complains that the authorities' refusals to let him hold meetings, because promoting Vaishnavism did not correspond to the purposes of a public event under the relevant law and was incompatible with respect for the religious beliefs of others, breached his rights under Article 9 and Article 11 (freedom of assembly and association).

Violation of Article 9 in respect of the applicant organization

Violation of Article 11 interpreted in the light of Article 9 in respect of Mr Frolov

Just satisfaction: non-pecuniary damage: EUR 7,500 to each applicant costs and expenses: EUR 2,000 to the applicants jointly

HRWF Comment

Noteworthy is the following passage of the European Court decision 43.

Accordingly, the Court finds that, by using derogatory language and unsubstantiated allegations for describing the applicant centre's religious beliefs and the ways in which they are expressed, the Russian authorities have overstepped their margin of appreciation. There has accordingly been a violation of Article 9 of the Convention."

and the European Court decision:

The Court unanimously

1. ***Declares the complaints concerning the "anti-cult" campaign of the Ulyanovsk Government and the withholding of approval for planned public religious events admissible and the remainder of the application inadmissible;***
2. *Holds that there has been a violation of Article 9 of the Convention in respect of the applicant centre;*
3. *Holds that it is not necessary to examine separately the complaint under Article 14 of the Convention, taken in conjunction with Article 9;*
4. *Holds that there has been a violation of Article 11 of the Convention, interpreted in the light of Article 9, in respect of Mr Frolov;*
5. *Holds*

- (a) that the respondent State is to pay, within three months from the date on which the judgment becomes final in accordance with Article 44 § 2 of the Convention, the following amounts, to be converted into the currency of the respondent State at the rate applicable at the date of settlement:
- (i) EUR 7,500 (seven thousand five hundred euros) to each applicant, plus any tax that may be chargeable, in respect of non-pecuniary damage;
 - (ii) EUR 2,000 (two thousand euros) to the applicants jointly, plus any tax that may be chargeable to them, in respect of costs and expenses;
- (b) that from the expiry of the above-mentioned three months until settlement simple interest shall be payable on the above amounts at a rate equal to the marginal lending rate of the European Central Bank during the default period plus three percentage points;

6. Dismisses the remainder of the applicants' claim for just satisfaction.

Done in English, and notified in writing on 23 November 2021, pursuant to Rule 77 §§ 2 and 3 of the Rules of Court.

Photo by Romy Arroyo Fernandez/NurPhoto via Getty Images

The European Court condemns Russia for the enforced expulsion of two missionaries of the Church of Unification

Corley and Others v. Russia (Applications nos. [292/06](#) and [43490/06](#))

HRWF (24.11.2021) - With this judgment, the European Court has just confirmed again that the protection of Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights does not only concern historical religions and belief systems with institutional characteristics but also newer religions, which is the case of the Church of Unification. Counter-cult, anti-cult organizations and "cult-watching" state agencies discriminating between so-called cults and religions – a stigmatizing process - should give up their argument that so-called cults are not religious or belief systems. The European Court thinks otherwise. Its judgements are parts on the rule of law and are in line with the U.N. standards:

UN Human Rights Committee, General Comment No. 22: The Right to Freedom of Thought, Conscience and Religion (Article 18), 27 September 1993, UN Doc. [CCPR/C/21/Rev.1/Add.4, para. 2.](#)

"Article 18 protects theistic, non-theistic and atheistic beliefs, as well as the right not to profess any religion or belief. The terms "belief" and "religion" are to be broadly construed. Article 18 of the ICCPR is not limited in its application to traditional religions or to religions and beliefs "with institutional characteristics or practices analogous to those of traditional religions. The Committee therefore views with concern any tendency to discriminate against any religion or belief for any reason, including the fact that they are newly established, or represent religious minorities that may be the subject of hostility on the part of a predominant religious community."

Report of the U.N. Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, U.N. Doc A/61/340, 13 September 2006, [pp. 49-51](#)

“(…) when religious minorities are groups that follow a so-called non-traditional or newer religion, the members of these communities may be the object of suspicion and, consequently, suffer greater limitations to their right to freedom of religion or belief.”

Multiple violations in enforced expulsions from Russia of two foreign missionaries

Registrar of the European Court (23.11.2021) - In today's **Chamber** judgment¹ in the case of **Corley and Others v. Russia** (application nos. 292/06 and 43490/06) the European Court of Human Rights held, unanimously, that there had been:

a violation of Article 1 of Protocol No. 7 (procedural safeguards relating to expulsion of aliens) to the European Convention on Human Rights in respect of the two missionary applicants (Mr Corley and Mr Igarashi);

a violation of Article 2 of Protocol No. 4 (freedom of movement) to the European Convention in respect of Mr Igarashi;

a violation of Article 9 (freedom of thought, conscience and religion) of the Convention in respect of Mr Corley and Mr Igarashi;

a violation of Article 8 (right to respect for private and family life) in respect of Mr Corley and Mr Igarashi and their families;

a violation of Article 3 (prohibition of inhuman or degrading treatment) on account of Mr Igarashi's degrading conditions of detention; and

a violation of Article 5 §§ 1 and 5 (right to liberty and security) in respect of Mr Igarashi.

The case concerned the sudden and enforced expulsion from Russia of two missionaries of the Unification Church, ostensibly for violating residence regulations.

The Court found in particular that the authorities had deliberately expedited the proceedings, dispensing with the legal formalities and thus denying Mr Corley and Mr Igarashi the possibility of exercising their procedural rights prior to their expulsion.

As nothing indicated that they had been engaged in any activity other than missionary work, the Court found that their forced departure constituted interference with their right to freedom of religion. Having regard to the pattern of involvement of the security services in their expulsions, it concluded that their expulsions had been undertaken to stifle the spreading of the teaching of the Unification Church in Russia.

Principal facts

The applicants are two missionaries of the Unification Church, a religious movement founded by Rev. Sun Myung Moon, and their families. Mr John Corley, his wife Renée and their son Nikolai, born in 1953, 1952 and 1995 respectively, are American nationals and now live in Irvington, NY, USA. Mr Shuji Igarashi, his wife Toshiko and their daughter Hanae, are Japanese nationals, born in 1946, 1947 and 1982 respectively, and now live

in Kawasaki, Japan. Since 1990 and 1993 respectively, Mr Corley and Mr Igarashi had lived in Russia with their families and worked as missionaries.

In early 2006, they were both suddenly expelled from Russia ostensibly for having violated residence regulations.

At that time, Mr Igarashi was the highest-ranking official in the Unification Church of Eurasia, and Mr Corley's supervisor. Both had been supervisors of Patrick Nolan, the applicant in *Nolan and K. v. Russia*, (no. 2512/04) of 12 February 2009).

In the case of Mr Corley, State officials showed up at his home towards the end of December 2005 and demanded his identity documents purportedly to check his registration with the Passport and Visa Department. His passport was given back to him three days later with a new leave to remain which expired before the end of winter holidays. Due to the closure of the courts during the holidays, no judge to consider his application for suspensive relief could be found. A day after his leave to remain expired, he was presented with an administrative offence report, a judgment finding him guilty as charged, and a fine. He was ordered to leave the country immediately and was escorted to the airport by uniformed officials, where he boarded a flight to Latvia. His application for judicial review filed from abroad was unsuccessful.

In the case of Mr Igarashi, in February 2006 he went to a rural location near Yekaterinburg to participate in a religious seminar. Less than three days later, on a Sunday morning, six officers from the local police and security services arrived at the seminar venue to check his passport and charged him with failure to register his stay with the local police. A local court was opened especially for him on a Sunday; it convicted Mr Igarashi that same morning and issued a fine and an order for his expulsion from Russia. Pending expulsion, he was to be detained. Mr Igarashi was detained in Yekaterinburg detention centre, in allegedly overcrowded and unsanitary conditions. Police officials offered him release in exchange for his waiver of his right to appeal and acceptance to pay for expulsion expenses. Mr Igarashi signed the waiver and was taken directly to the airport. He was accompanied on the flight to Moscow by two officers of the Federal Migration Service and left Russia the same day.

Appeal against the judgment which Mr Igarashi lodged from Japan was successful; an appeal court found that Mr Igarashi had not committed any administrative offence.

Complaints, procedure and composition of the Court

Relying on Article 1 of Protocol No. 7 (procedural safeguards relating to expulsion of aliens) and Article 9 (freedom of thought, conscience and religion) of the European Convention, Mr Corley and Mr Igarashi complained that the measures against them had not been carried out lawfully, that they had not benefited from the requisite safeguards and that their enforced departure from Russia had been part of a pattern of expulsions of the Unification Church's missionaries aimed at stifling the spread of Unification Church in Russia. They also alleged under Article 8 (right to respect for private and family life) that their enforced departure from Russia had interfered with their family lives. In addition, Mr Igarashi complained under Article 2 of Protocol No. 4 (freedom of movement) and Article 3 (prohibition of inhuman or degrading treatment) of his heavy-handed arrest, the unseemly haste of his same-day conviction and imprisonment and the use of the degrading conditions of his detention to bargain for his agreement to drop any appeal and to immediately leave Russia. Relying on Article 5 §§ 1 (f) and 5 (right to liberty and security) he alleged that he had been unlawfully detained but had no right under Russian law to compensation for wrongful imprisonment.

The applications were lodged with the European Court of Human Rights on 4 January and 23 October 2006 respectively. Given the similar subject matter, the Court examined the applications jointly in a single judgment. Judgment was given by a Chamber of seven judges, composed as follows:

Georges **Ravarani** (Luxembourg), *President*,

Dmitry **Dedov** (Russia),

María **Elósegui** (Spain),

Darian **Pavli** (Albania),

Peeter **Roosma** (Estonia),

Andreas **Zünd** (Switzerland),

Frédéric **Krenc** (Belgium),

and also Milan **Blaško**, *Section Registrar*.

Decision of the Court

Article 1 of Protocol no. 7

The Court noted that the domestic authorities had used a stratagem to get hold of Mr Corley's valid leave to remain. His identity documents had been taken away from him on the pretence of checking them; he had not been given advance warning of the decision to replace his leave to remain and he had been unable to ascertain the reasons for that decision or to submit reasons against it. The Migration Service's decision replacing his leave to stay with a shorter one did not cite a specific legal basis for that measure. Moreover, Mr Corley's new leave to remain was issued one day after the Russian courts had closed for the winter holidays. It was set to expire before they would reopen for business after the holidays. By timing the new leave to stay to coincide with a holiday period, the Russian authorities had consciously created a situation in which Mr Corley's application for review could not be considered before his expulsion. He had therefore been denied a realistic possibility of exercising his rights under Article 1 § 1 of Protocol No. 7.

Mr Igarashi had likewise been induced into believing that the police merely intended to check his documents. He could not have anticipated that he would be charged with a breach of residence regulations before the grace period for registering a new residence had expired. The unusually fast pace of events and the suddenness with which Mr Igarashi had been charged, tried, convicted, served with an expulsion order and placed in detention pending expulsion in the course of just one Sunday morning indicated that the authorities had sought to prevent him from making any effective use of the remedies theoretically available to him.

The waiver of the right to appeal that he had been made to sign was invalid under Russian law and was not once mentioned in the ensuing appeal proceedings. The circumstances in which a court convicted and imprisoned Mr Igarashi for an offence he had not committed, and in which his liberty was leveraged in order to expedite his departure, disclosed the authorities' determination to make him leave Russia by all means possible with little concern for legal formalities. As with Mr Corley, the authorities

had deliberately created a situation in which Mr Igarashi had been denied the possibility of exercising his rights under Article 1 § 1 of Protocol No. 7 prior to his expulsion.

There had therefore been a violation of Article 1 of Protocol No. 7 in respect of both of them.

Article 2 of Protocol no. 4

Article 2 of Protocol No. 4 guarantees the right to liberty of movement and freedom to choose their residence to everyone who is "lawfully within the territory of a State". The Court noted that the appeal court had quashed Mr Igarashi's conviction on the grounds that he could not be sanctioned for failing to register a change of his place of stay prior to the expiry of the statutory three-day time-limit. It had thus been acknowledged that that measure had not been legal. There had therefore been a violation of Article 2 of Protocol No. 4 in respect of Mr Igarashi.

Article 9

Mr Corley and Mr Igarashi had come to Russia in 1990 and 1993, respectively, at the invitation of the Unification Church, a religious association officially registered in Russia. Both of them were compelled to leave Russia in 2006 on allegedly formal grounds which were not ostensibly related to their religious work. Nevertheless, there were indications that their enforced departure was connected with the exercise of their right to freedom of religion and was aimed at preventing the spreading of the teaching of the Unification Church in Russia.

As there was nothing to indicate that either of them held any employment or position outside the Unification Church or engaged in anything other than religious work, the Court concluded that the reasons for their enforced departure were connected with that work. The pattern of involvement of the security services in the enforced departures of members of the Unification Church from Russia suggested that those measures had been taken for the purpose of repressing the exercise of their right to freedom of religion and stifling the spreading of the Church's teaching in Russia. As the interests of national security could not serve as a justification for any measures interfering with the right to freedom of religion, and as the Government had not put forward any justification for the involvement of security services in what was claimed to be an ordinary breach of residence regulations, the Court found that there had been a violation of Article 9 of the Convention.

Article 8

Following their enforced departure from Russia, Mr Corley and Mr Igarashi were separated from their wives and children, who had not been able to follow them immediately due to their community ties in Russia. The measures forcing them to leave amounted to interference not just with their right to respect for family life but also that of their family members. As the Court had found that their expulsion had been carried out in breach of domestic law, such an interference had not been justified. There had therefore been a violation of Article 8 of the Convention in respect of all the applicants.

Article 3

The Court has already found that overnight detention in police cells designed for short stays only and lacking the amenities indispensable for prolonged detention discloses a violation of Article 3 of the Convention. Following a summary trial, Mr Igarashi had been placed in conditions in which no provision had been made for meeting his basic needs.

The cell was cold, sleeping arrangements were rudimentary, and basic personal hygiene items were lacking. He had therefore been subjected to “degrading treatment” in breach of Article 3 of the Convention.

Article 5

The Court considered that Mr Igarashi’s detention had been arbitrary and violated the lawfulness requirement under Article 5 § 1 of the Convention. However, he had had no enforceable right to compensation because of the restrictive wording of the relevant provisions of the Civil Code. There had therefore been a violation of Article 5 §§ 1 and 5 of the Convention in his respect.

Just satisfaction (Article 41)

The Court held that Russia was to pay Mr Igarashi 1,270 euros (EUR) in respect of pecuniary damage, EUR 10,000 to Mr Corley and EUR 15,000 to Mr Igarashi in respect of non-pecuniary damage and EUR 4,000 to the applicants jointly in respect of costs and expenses.

The judgment is available only in English.

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The European Court of Human Rights was set up in Strasbourg by the Council of Europe Member States in 1959 to deal with alleged violations of the 1950 European Convention on Human Rights.

Photo: news.bbc.co.uk

First acquittal of a Jehovah's Witness under Article 282.2 of the Russian Criminal Code in Vladivostok

JW.ORG (22.11.2021) - <https://bit.ly/32ruJ31> - On 22 November 2021 in Vladivostok, following the [explanations](#) of the Plenum of the Supreme Court of the RF, an unprecedented event took place: after a continuous chain of convictions of Jehovah's Witnesses Dmitriy Barmakin was found not guilty under part 1 of article 282.2 of the RF Criminal Code and acquitted by the court with the right to rehabilitation.

Judge Stanislav Salnikov of the Pervorechenskiy District Court in Vladivostok handed down the acquittal verdict. The text of the verdict echoes a recent explanation by the Plenum of the Supreme Court. The verdict notes: "The Court, having considered the present case, is convinced that both for every person in general and for everyone of Jehovah's Witnesses, attending joint worship services, providing premises for them, reading and discussing religious literature, spreading religious beliefs, observing religious rites and ceremonies, singing spiritual songs, offering prayers are forms of lawful conduct which are part of freedom of conscience and freedom of religion. . . . Conducting religious rites of Jehovah's Witnesses in residential or commercial premises... does not violate the law, but is the implementation of the rights of believers to freedom of conscience and religion, because such a right cannot be limited exclusively to the space of private life, it can also be implemented in the external sphere, including in mass collective forms."

In addition, the verdict says that Barmakin "is subject to acquittal due to the absence of corpus delicti in the defendant's actions" because the believer had "exercised the right to freedom of religion enshrined in the Constitution of Russia." Judge Salnikov noted: "In criminal proceedings on crimes of extremist orientation, to which article 282.2 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation refers, it is necessary to keep in mind that... the motives of committing the specified crimes must be proved.... Such motives are not proven in the case. . . . Rights related to freedom of religion must be ensured regardless of whether a person is a member of any religious organization or not, so the right to practice the religion of Jehovah's Witnesses must be ensured even after the decision of the Supreme Court of Russia of 20.04.2017". Having examined the evidence presented by the investigation, the court concluded that "Barmakin D. V. never carried out extremist activities, he practiced the religion of Jehovah's Witnesses, including meeting and discussing his beliefs with his fellow believers".

Significantly, the court noted that "the ideology of the Jehovah's Witnesses religion is not recognized as extremist in Russia," and "the Bible... [its] content and quotations cannot be recognized as extremist materials."

Dmitriy Barmakin and his wife, Yelena, moved from Crimea to Vladivostok to take care of their elderly mother-in-law. On the morning of July 28, 2018, armed law enforcement officers in masks burst into the house of a 90-year-old woman, where the Barmakins were staying. They detained the believer, accusing him of organizing the activities of an organization banned by the court. The court sent him to a pre-trial detention center, where he spent 15 months, the first 2.5 months in a damp basement cell with rats and insects. Nevertheless, Dmitriy Barmakin categorically refused to plead guilty to the charges. After his release from jail Barmakin spent more than two years under prohibition of certain actions, namely, to change his place of residence, contact a number of people, receive mail and use means of communication.

The case was managed by the Investigative Committee of Russia in the Pervorechenskiy District of Vladivostok. The key witness for the prosecution in the case was 30-year-old local resident Ekaterina Petrova, a teacher at the Primorye Energy College in Vladivostok.

Pretending to be interested in the Bible, she met with believers and asked them questions about their faith in God. It was later revealed that she was conducting covert audio recording on assignment from the security services.

In August 2019, Barmakin's wife, Yelena, also faced criminal prosecution. [A criminal case](#) was also opened against her for "extremism". Later, nine more peaceful believers became defendants in this case.

"Of course, it is not easy to be the first judge to interrupt a continuous chain of guilty verdicts and deliver a verdict of acquittal. We are grateful to Judge Stanislav Salnikov for his strength and his sound approach to the case. We hope that all Russian courts in their decisions on cases involving Jehovah's Witnesses will be guided by the decision of the Plenum of the Russian Supreme Court," commented Yaroslav Sivulskiy, a spokesman for the European Association of Jehovah's Witnesses, on the verdict for Barmakin and added: "The verdict stressed what Jehovah's Witnesses were trying to make clear in all these years of religious persecution in Russia: religious activity by its very nature cannot be a threat to society or the state in any other way. I would like to believe that this verdict is only the first of many decisions in similar cases."

Dr. Sergey Ivanenko, a religious scholar, analyzed the situation with Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia and [concluded](#): "Having found themselves on trial, Jehovah's Witnesses do not consider themselves guilty and have no intention of abandoning their religious beliefs... Remaining Jehovah's Witnesses, they do not consider themselves criminals. Moreover Article 28 of the Constitution of the Russian Federation "guarantees everyone freedom of conscience, freedom of religion, including the right to profess individually or collectively any religion or not to profess any, to freely choose, have and disseminate religious and other beliefs and to act in accordance with them."

BRIEF HISTORY OF THE CASE

Dmitry Barmakin came to Vladivostok from Crimea to take care of his wife's sick mother. On July 28, 2018, Far Eastern law enforcement officers, wearing masks and with weapons, broke into the house of an elderly woman and arrested Dmitry for praying to Jehovah God and not hiding it. He spent over a year in jail. The judge returned the criminal case against the believer to the prosecutor because of the ambiguity of the charges - it contained only descriptions of religious rites. In April 2021, the case was returned to the Pervorechensky District Court of Vladivostok for consideration by Judge Stanislav Salnikov. On November 22, 2021, the court fully acquitted Dmitry Barmakin.

TIMELINE

Case of Barmakin in Vladivostok

Region:

Primorye Territory

Locality:

Vladivostok

Case number:

11802050005000051

Number of the case in court:

1-305 / 2021 (1-21 / 2020; 1-388 / 2019)

Current stage:

trial in appellate court

Suspected of:

according to the investigators, together with others he conducted divine services, which is interpreted as "organizing the activities of an extremist organization" (with reference to the decision of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation on the liquidation of all 396 registered organizations of Jehovah's Witnesses)

Article of the Russian Criminal Code:

282.2 (1)

Investigating:

Investigative Directorate for Pervorechensky District of Vladivostok Investigative Directorate of the Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation for Primorsky Territory

Case initiated:

Jul 27, 2018 Free transfer

Considers on the merits:

Pervorechensky District Court of Vladivostok

Judge:

Stanislav Salnikov

RELATED ARTICLE

[Novaya Gazeta](#) (Nobel Peace Prize 2021)

Photo: Dmitry Barmakin with his wife, Elena, after the announcement of the acquittal

Russian Supreme Court rules Jehovah's Witnesses should not be prosecuted for joint worship

JW-Russia (20.11.2021) - <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/11/151413.html> - On October 28, 2021, the Plenum of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation ruled that joint worship of Jehovah's Witnesses, their rites, and ceremonies do not constitute a crime under Article 282.2 of the Russian Criminal Code, despite the liquidation of the religion's legal entities.

What is the Plenum of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation and what influence does it have on the judicial system?

The Plenum consists of all of the Supreme Court judges of the Russian Federation and is presided over by the Chief Justice. The Plenum is responsible for ensuring the uniform application by all courts of the legislation of the Russian Federation. Thus, the Plenum gives explanations on issues arising in judicial practice and interpretation of the current legislation. The Plenum adopts its explanations in the form of resolutions, which are binding for all courts, and as such they are taken into consideration by other courts in the administration of justice. In the case of the October 28 ruling, the Plenum amended a prior resolution.

What is the background of the October 28 ruling?

In December 2018, Vladimir Putin [expressed bewilderment](#) at the persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses and [recommended](#) that the Russian Supreme Court summarize court practice in cases involving violations of legislation on religious associations. Two years later, at a meeting of the Human Rights Council, human rights defender Alexander Verkhovsky again [pointed out](#) to the Head of State the absurdity of prosecuting believers whose organizations had been banned; as a result, the President issued [new instructions](#) to the Supreme Court to prepare explanations regarding the generalization of court practice in cases related to violations of legislation on religious associations.

Per the president's instructions, the Plenum addressed the issue and issued new amendments at their October 28 meeting, [explains](#) judge-rapporteur Elena Peysikova. In addition, the Plenum revealed that the new clarifications were repeatedly discussed at meetings of the expanded working group with the participation of the FSB. "It appears," the judge-rapporteur concluded, "that this clarification will allow to unify the existing practice of application of Article 282.2 of the Criminal Code and avoid cases of unjustified criminal prosecution of persons solely in connection with the external manifestation of their attitude towards religion."

What did the Plenum clarify regarding joint worship?

Amendments were made to clause 20 of Resolution No. 11 of the Plenum of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation of 28 June 2011, "On judicial practice in cases related to crimes of extremist orientation." One of these amendments directly concerns the 2017 Supreme Court ruling that liquidated all of the legal entities of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia and Crimea. Since that ruling, law enforcement officials have wrongly interpreted joint confession of religion by individual Jehovah's Witnesses as organizing or participating in the activities of their liquidated legal entities. As a result, believers have been sentenced as much as 8 years in prison.

However, the Plenum's October 28 amendments clarify: "In the event that a court decides to liquidate or ban the activity of a public or religious association or other organization due to extremist activity, *the subsequent actions of persons not connected with the perpetuating or renewing the activity of the relevant extremist organization and consisting exclusively in the exercise of their right to freedom of conscience and freedom of religion, including through individual or joint profession of religion, performance of religious services or other religious rites and ceremonies, if such do not contain elements of extremism, do not on their own constitute the corpus delicti.*" "

In practice, the amendments pose new challenges for an investigator to initiate a criminal case, conduct a search, or detain a person simply because he or she professes the religion of Jehovah's Witnesses or meets with another at a worship service. Courts should no longer view it a crime to read the Bible or spiritual literature, talk about one's faith, or the like. It is also not a crime to convene fellow believers to peacefully practice Jehovah's Witnesses' religion together, to prepare and perform rituals such as water baptism. Since 2017, such actions have been wrongly prosecuted under Part 1 of Article 282.2 of the Criminal Code (organization of activities of a banned organization).

What actions then, according to the new amendments, can be considered a crime?

"When considering a criminal case on a crime under Article 282.2 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation, the court should establish *what specific actions have been committed by the perpetrator, what is their significance for the perpetuating or renewing the activity of the organization, against which the court rendered an enforceable decision to liquidate it or ban its activities due to extremism, as well as what motives guided the person in committing these actions.*" In other words, investigators will now have to justify the wording often used in indictment papers against Jehovah's Witnesses: "realizing criminal intent", "acting from extremist motives", "being aware of the unlawful nature of their actions", "having entered into criminal collusion", "as part of a group of

persons by prior collusion”, “not voluntarily ceasing participation in activities”, “having the intent to resume activities” and others.

Do these amendments obligate courts to review of the sentences already passed?

When considering appeals and cassation appeals, the courts are obliged to consider the Plenum's amendments.

As October 28, there were 152 convictions of Jehovah's Witnesses. Of these, the sentences of 40 believers are under appeal so have not yet entered into force. The remaining verdicts for the believers have already entered into force, and are currently being appealed in cassation proceedings.

Another 11 believers' sentences have already been reviewed by the cassation courts, but Russian law affords them the right to file a second cassation appeal to the Supreme Court of Russia. 70-year-old [Valentina Baranovskaya](#) is currently preparing her second cassation appeal to the Supreme Court. Valentina remains in prison despite suffering a stroke while under investigation. The international human rights community, who have repeatedly criticize Russia's treatment of Jehovah's Witnesses, eagerly anticipates how the Supreme Court of Russia will apply the new amendments and release the woman when considering the Baranovskaya case in the coming months.

Photo : The building of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation

U.S. adds Russia to list of nations violating religious freedoms

By Carlie Porterfield (*)
Forbes Staff

FORBES (17.11.2021) - <https://bit.ly/3cptYJp> - The United States has added Russia to an index of countries called out over “egregious violations of religious freedom,” Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Wednesday, which could have economic policy consequences for nations listed.

KEY FACTS

Russia was added to the list amid media reports from ABC News, *Foreign Policy* and local media of police harassing, detaining and seizing property of the country's Jehovah's Witnesses, an offshoot of Christianity with roots in the U.S.

The domination was banned in Russia in 2017 over being “extremist,” and hundreds of worshippers have been jailed since, according to reports. Authorities in Russia also target Muslim minority groups on the pretense of investigating terrorist threats, Blinken said.

Russia joins the list alongside countries noted to be places of “particular concern,” including North Korea, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Burma and China, the secretary of state said. Congress is notified when countries are listed and economic measures can be imposed if other policy options do not stop “particularly severe violations” of religious freedom, according to the state department.

This summer, the Biden Administration warned American businesses against using materials or services created by Uighurs in Xinjiang, China, where the government set up forced labor camps, warning that it is a violation of sanctions preventing forced labor.

On Wednesday, the Russian Supreme Court ruled to ban criminal prosecution of Jehovah's Witnesses for group prayer, which media outlets like the *Moscow Times* speculate may end police raids over services.

The list is part of the state department's annual International Religious Freedom Report, which will be delivered to Congress. The U.S. will "continue to press" countries to address their shortcomings and ensure religious freedom, Blinken said Wednesday. Since the 1991 dissolution of the Soviet Union, which pushed state atheism, religious practice has made a comeback in Russia. The most-practiced religion in Russia is Russian Orthodoxy, a branch of Christianity that traces its history back to the apostle Andrew, who according to tradition traveled and proselytized across the region north of the Black Sea.

(*) Carlie Porterfield

I am a Texas native covering breaking news out of New York City. Previously, I was an editorial assistant at the Forbes London bureau.

Photo : Jehovah's Witnesses sing songs at the beginning of a meeting in Rostov-on-Don, Russia, in 2015 - THE WASHINGTON POST VIA GETTY IMAGES

Russia's Top Court bans prosecuting Jehovah's Witnesses for group prayer

The Moscow Times (17.11.2021) - <https://bit.ly/3wTQ2p3> - Russia's Supreme Court has banned the criminal prosecution of Jehovah's Witnesses for joint worship, potentially putting an end to the law enforcement practice of jailing believers for prayer sessions.

The ruling could also affect the 152 convictions that have not yet entered into force or are being appealed, the Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia organization said in a statement on its website Tuesday.

Russia outlawed the nonconformist Christian denomination as "extremist" in 2017 and has since subjected thousands of worshippers to police raids, harassment and up to eight years of imprisonment.

Russia's Supreme Court binds law enforcement authorities to provide concrete evidence for the worshippers' "criminal intent," "extremist motives" and "prior collusion" — justifications for criminal prosecution that have been criticized as arbitrary.

The organization said the ruling poses "new challenges" for authorities to open criminal cases, search residences or "detain a person simply because he or she professes the religion of Jehovah's Witnesses or meets with another at a worship service."

"Investigators will now have to justify the wording often used in indictment papers against Jehovah's Witnesses," it said.

The Supreme Court's plenum ruled that joint prayers among members of banned religious organizations "consisting exclusively in the exercise of their right to freedom of

conscience and freedom of religion, including through individual or joint profession of religion... do not contain elements of extremism.”

The Jehovah’s Witnesses in Russia noted that the country’s courts are under the obligation to “consider” the Supreme Court ruling when considering appeals.

The group said it “eagerly anticipates” how the Oct. 28 Supreme Court plenum ruling will affect the release of its members currently held in custody.

In its original 2017 “extremist” ruling, the Russian Supreme Court accused the Jehovah’s Witnesses of “propaganda of exclusivity” and signs of violating public safety.

The Soviet Union had exiled thousands of Jehovah’s Witnesses, known for door-to-door preaching and an alternative interpretation of the Bible, to Siberia for anti-communist activities and their refusal to serve in the military.

Special Bimonthly FORB digest (01-14.11.2021)

11.11.2021 - Three Jehovah's Witnesses detained after searches in Astrakhan region

Link to full text (only in Russian): <https://credo.press/239661/>
(Use <https://www.deepl.com/translator> for automatic translation)

New searches of Jehovah's Witnesses took place on November 9 in Akhtubinsk and Znamensk (Astrakhan Region). As the correspondent of the Portal "Credo.Press" reports, dozens of people were detained for interrogation as a result of the searches. Three were sent to the temporary detention center: 48-year-old Sergei Korolev, 60-year-old Sergei Kosyanenko and 34-year-old Rinat Kiramov.

Hours of searches and interrogations began at about 6 am. In at least one of the cases - during a search at Rinat Kiramov's house - the security forces broke down the front doors of the dwelling.

New searches and arrests in the region came shortly after the court handed down one of the harshest sentences since the ban on Jehovah's Witnesses legal entities in Russia. On October 25, Rustam Diarov, Sergei Klikunov and Yevgeny Ivanov were sentenced to 8 years, and Yevgeny's wife Olga was sentenced to 3.5 years in a general regime colony for belonging to the organization of Jehovah's Witnesses *.

* In 2017, the Supreme Court recognized all religious organizations of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia as extremist and liquidated them, which led to massive persecution of believers under Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation

11.11.2021 - USCIRF recommends including the Russian Federation in the list of countries with the maximum number of violations

Link to full text (only in Russian): <https://credo.press/239655/>

(Use <https://www.deepl.com/translator> for automatic translation)

The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) published on November 5 recommendations to include several more countries on the list of particular concerns about the state of religious freedom in them. Russia is also mentioned among these countries, reports IAC "Sova" (recognized by the authorities of the Russian Federation as a foreign agent, but disputes this status).

The Commission recommended that the US Department of State update the Country of Particular Concern (CPC) or Special Watchlist (SWL) list.

10.11.2021 - Jehovah's Witness who was forcibly placed in a psychiatric hospital, obtained compensation from the Russian Federation

Link to full text (only in Russian): <https://credo.press/239647/>
(Use <https://www.deepl.com/translator> for automatic translation)

In the second half of October, the court of the Khanty-Mansiysk Autonomous Okrug - Ugra recovered 28,500 rubles from the Russian Federation in favor of Jehovah's Witness * Timofey Zhukov, who was forcibly hospitalized for a psychiatric examination because of his faith. This decision coincided with the beginning of the trial of him and 19 other residents of Surgut, the correspondent of the Portal "Credo.Press" reports, citing a source among Russian Jehovah's Witnesses.

A criminal case against believers from this city was initiated in February 2019. Then they were searched, and some of them reported that they were tortured by law enforcement officers right in the building of the Investigative Committee.

Continue reading...

10.11.2021 - In the Urals, the introduction of QR codes for entering mosques is being discussed

Link to full text (only in Russian): <https://ria.ru/20211110/mecheti-1758358045.html>
(Use <https://www.deepl.com/translator> for automatic translation)

The Ural Mukhtasibat is discussing the possibility of introducing QR codes for visiting mosques in the Sverdlovsk region, Artur Mukhutdinov, chairman of the Spiritual Directorate of Muslims in the region, told RIA Novosti.

Earlier, the vice-governor of the Sverdlovsk region Pavel Krekov said that the authorities recommend making churches, mosques and synagogues COVID-free zones, but the final decision is with the leadership of the confessions.

"(The question of introducing QR codes) is still under discussion. We have a difficult situation in this regard. For example, for Friday prayers, people do not fit in the mosque. There are not enough mosques, many people come to the street. Religious leaders, of course, can call people, so that only those who are vaccinated and who have a QR code or who have been ill come. But who will check them? How feasible it will be is a question. Now no decisions have been made at the level of discussions of the council of the Ural Mukhtasibat", - said the interlocutor of the agency.

According to Mukhutdinov, the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the Sverdlovsk Region regularly monitors statistics on the incidence of coronavirus in the region and vaccinations, as well as monitors new government regulations.

09.11.2021 - A court in Moscow retained Jehovah's Witness in custody, despite the guarantee of a member of the HRC under the President of the Russian Federation

Link to full text (only in Russian): <https://credo.press/239626/>
(Use <https://www.deepl.com/translator> for automatic translation)

The Savyolovsky District Court of Moscow extended the detention of Jehovah's Witness Yuri Temirbulatov for another 3 months on November 8. While in custody, he underwent surgery. Andrei Babushkin from the Human Rights Council (HRC) under the President of the Russian Federation personally asked the court to soften his measure of restraint and presented the court with a surety for the suspect, the correspondent of the Credo.Press portal reports, citing a source among Russian Jehovah's Witnesses.

The believer has been imprisoned for 9 months already, despite the fact that he suffers from numerous chronic diseases. In addition, he was diagnosed with an oncological disease in the pre-trial detention center. In October, Temirbulatov underwent a major operation to remove the tumor. After being discharged from the hospital, he was transferred back to the Matrosskaya Tishina SIZO.

Continue reading...

09.11.2021 - Three Stavropol Muslims have been warned for holding a prayer meeting

Link to full text (only in Russian): <https://credo.press/239613/>
(Use <https://www.deepl.com/translator> for automatic translation)

At the end of October, the Industrial Court of Stavropol found Magomed Salamov, Rajab Khaamirzaev and Magomed Gitinov guilty under Part 2 of Art. 20.2 of the Code of Administrative Offenses of the Russian Federation (organizing or holding a public event without filing a notification of the holding of a public event in accordance with the established procedure), reported on November 8 IAC "Sova" (recognized by the authorities of the Russian Federation as a foreign agent, but disputes this status).

The reason for the initiation of the case was the holding of a prayer meeting in the "Sofia" banquet hall "with the preaching of scholars and theologians and the performance of religious chants (nasheeds)." The announcement of the meeting was published on Instagram, and more than 200 people attended the meeting.

08.11.2021 - Putin removes the Taliban from the List of terrorist organizations

Link to full text (only in Russian): <https://credo.press/239608/>
(Use <https://www.deepl.com/translator> for automatic translation)

At the end of October, Vladimir Putin said that Russia would "move" towards the exclusion of the Taliban from the List of terrorist organizations, noting that the decision to recognize the Taliban as terrorist was made at the UN level.

The management of MIA Rossiya Segodnya, which includes the RIA Novosti agency, sent out a letter to employees demanding to stop calling the Taliban movement* an "organization banned in Russia" in their materials. A screenshot of the letter [was published](#) on November 8 [by](#) the telegram channel "Caution, news". One of the employees of RIA Novosti [confirmed](#) to the channel "We can explain" that he received such a letter.

08.11.2021 - Civil rights committee takes stand for Jehovah's Witnesses

Link to full text in Russian: <https://credo.press/239610/>

Jehovah's Witnesses are distinguished by their amazing steadfastness in the face of persecutions. There are almost no instances of renunciation of the faith among them. And they are persecuted in states with authoritarian and totalitarian regimes. Treatment of this confession is the litmus test of democracy.

[Continue reading...](#)

08.11.2021 - In Crimea, Jehovah's Witnesses jailed for 'extremism,' sent to Russian labor camps

On Oct. 22, a judge in the city of Sevastopol jailed 49-year-old Jehovah's Witness Igor Schmidt for six years on extremism-related charges, to be followed by six years of restrictions. The prosecution presented no one in court who they said had been a victim of Schmidt's exercise of his freedom of religion and belief. If any appeal fails, he is likely to be sent to a labor camp in Russia to serve his sentence.

[Continue reading...](#)

03.11.2021 - Professor of the Department of Criminal Law and Criminology of Moscow State University urged to supplement the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation with "insulting the feelings of atheists"

Link to full text (only in Russian): <https://credo.press/239546/>
(Use <https://www.deepl.com/translator> for automatic translation)

He cited as an example the administrative legislation of Russia and the article "Violation of the legislation on freedom of conscience, freedom of religion and on religious associations" of the Code of Administrative Offenses of the Russian Federation, which "spells out the protection of both religious people and non-believers."

"In the Administrative Code, the wording of this article is more logical. Criminal law is a policy, in this case, changes were made in 2013 to the edition of Article 148 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation, they were just related to the events that took place in society, when some people ran into the temple, performed some strange actions and all this was posted on social networks, - the professor recalled, referring to the "punk prayer" "Virgin Mary, chase Putin away." "So it was the state's reaction to very specific things."

03.11.2021 - The muftiate spoke about the reduction in the number of migrants in Moscow

Link to full text in Russian: <https://ria.ru/20211103/migranty-1757498342.html/>

In Moscow, there are not enough mosques even for local Muslims, not to mention migrants, so reducing the number of visiting Muslims in the capital and building new prayer houses will help improve the situation, Rushan Abbyasov, deputy head of the Council of Muftis of Russia (SMR), mufti of the Moscow region, told RIA Novosti.

Earlier, the deputy mayor of Moscow for construction, Andrey Bochkarev, said in an interview with RBC that the capital construction complex, together with contractors, should develop an action plan that would make it possible to do without foreign labor at the city's construction sites. To overcome the existing labor shortage in the construction sector of Moscow, according to the official, it is first of all necessary to raise wages and the level of mechanization at construction sites. As Bochkarev said, now about 40 thousand migrants work on construction sites in the capital, while before the COVID-19 pandemic there were 120 thousand of them.

Continue reading...

02.11.2021 - Deputy Chairman of the Committee of the State Duma of the Russian Federation called for the abolition of the article on "insulting the feelings of believers" as anti-constitutional

Link to full text (only in Russian): <https://credo.press/239524/>
(Use <https://www.deepl.com/translator> for automatic translation)

"According to the Constitution, our believers and atheists are equal," says the deputy. "But according to the law, it turns out that only the feelings of believers can be insulted. True, it seems that the Krasnodar prosecutor's office tried to find an insult to the feelings of atheists, but the atheists did not ask her about it. Therefore, several years ago we introduced a bill that has not yet been considered by the State Duma, which changes the subject of this article. We believe that offending the feelings of believers is possible only in the temple, or where other ritual actions are performed. The bill comes from the theory of dual truth, which was once professed in the 18th century. It boils down to the following: there is nothing for a violent atheist or adherent of another religion to do in someone else's temple, just as there is nothing to do for a violent believer at a secular exhibition, where he specially comes to offend his feelings. It is necessary to separate God from God, but to Caesar what is Caesar's. In combination with the exclusion of punishments from the Criminal Code and the transfer to the Administrative Code, I think this would be correct."

Special Bimonthly FORB digest (16-31.10.2021)

30.10.2021 – The case of "illegal" missionary work is opened against the Krasnodar imam

Link to full text (only in Russian): <https://credo.press/239479/>
(Use <https://www.deepl.com/translator> for automatic translation)

The Prikubanskiy District Court of Krasnodar received a case under Art. 5.26 of the Code of Administrative Offenses of the Russian Federation (violation of the legislation on freedom of conscience, freedom of religion and on religious associations) against Imam

Magomed Asuev, reported on October 29 IAC "Sova" (recognized by the authorities of the Russian Federation as a foreign agent, but disputes this status). The imam intends to challenge the drawing up of the administrative protocol in court.

[Continue reading...](#)

29.10.2021 - Stop persecuting Jehovah's Witnesses! Open petition of the Christian Action Movement

Link to full text (only in Russian): <https://credo.press/239472/>
(Use <https://www.deepl.com/translator> for automatic translation)

All religious organizations of Jehovah's Witnesses in the Russian Federation were recognized as extremist by the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation and liquidated - Approx. Ed.

With this statement, we want to draw attention to the intensification of the persecution for the faith of Jehovah's Witnesses, who are unreasonably declared extremists in our country. Today, the courts are sentencing them to significantly longer terms of imprisonment than they used to be. If only yesterday women from Jehovah's Witnesses were sentenced mainly to a suspended sentence, today they are actually being sent behind barbed wire.

[Continue reading...](#)

29.10.2021 - Muslim prisoners in the Kurgan region complained about the employees of the colony, who sneered at the Koran

Link to full text (only in Russian): <https://credo.press/239465/>
(Use <https://www.deepl.com/translator> for automatic translation)

Muslim prisoners in IK No. 2 in the Kurgan region have complained about the colony employees, reported on October 28 IAC "Sova" (recognized by the authorities of the Russian Federation as a foreign agent, but disputes this status). According to the prisoners, in August the colony officers confiscated their religious belongings, in particular, threw the Koran on the floor and stomped on it.

The prisoners appealed to the human rights activist Gabdulla Isakayev, who, in turn, appealed to the investigating authorities, but the initiation of a criminal case was refused. The FPS and the Investigative Directorate of the Investigative Committee "did not confirm" the facts stated in the appeal. Gabdulla Isakayev is trying to appeal against the refusal.

28.10.2021 - New searches of Jehovah's Witnesses took place in Chelyabinsk

Link to full text (only in Russian): <https://credo.press/239457/>
(Use <https://www.deepl.com/translator> for automatic translation)

On October 22, Chelyabinsk security forces searched the homes of 53-year-old Vadim Gizatulin and 52-year-old Irina Mikhailenko. Electronic devices and old telephone books were seized from their Chelyabinsk co-religionists during a search. After the searches, Vadim Gizatulin and his wife, as well as Irina Mikhailenko with her husband and son, were taken to the Investigative Committee for interrogation.

Operational measures for Chelyabinsk residents were repeated, they were sanctioned by the Traktorozavodsky District Court on the basis of a criminal case.

In April 2017, the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation declared extremist and liquidated all 396 religious organizations of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia.

28.10.2021 - "He suffers for his beliefs."

VIDEO: **"He suffers for his beliefs."** *Georgy Sukhoboky, a priest of the ROC MP from the Ulyanovsk region, is fired for sympathy for Alexei Navalny.*

[Link for the video](#)

26.10.2021 - USCIRF releases new report on religious freedom violations in Russia's Republic of Chechnya

The government of Chechnya—a tiny ethnic enclave in the North Caucasus region of Russia—is a highly authoritarian regime that perpetrates a wide array of human rights abuses, including severe violations of religious freedom. This report focuses on Chechnya as an example of the egregious religious repression in Russia.

[Continue reading...](#)

25.10.2021 - Case of Ivanov and others in Astrakhan

Link to full text in Russian) : <https://jw-russia.org/cases/astrakhan.html#20211025>

In June 2020, in Astrakhan, the investigator of the RF IC for the Astrakhan region Nikolai Banko opened a criminal case under an extremist article against Sergei Klikunov, Rustam Diarov, Yevgeny Ivanov and his wife Olga. The next day, June 9, a series of searches took place. After that, four believers were taken into custody.

[Continue reading...](#)

27.10.2021 - Representatives of the muftiats of the North Caucasus complain to the authorities about the "destructive activities" of the DUM RF

Link to full text (only in Russian): <https://credo.press/239433/>
(Use <https://www.deepl.com/translator> for automatic translation)

The leaders and activists of the Islamic community of the North Caucasus opposed the interference of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims (SAM) of the Russian Federation in the religious life of this region.

"To draw the attention of state and municipal authorities to the destructive activities of representatives of the so-called spiritual administration of Muslims of the Russian Federation in the North Caucasus, associated with the unjustified opening of parallel religious communities, leading to a split of Muslims and conflict situations, ignoring the inter-ethnic and inter-religious relations historically formed in the region," - said in the resolution of the conference held on October 26-27 in Maykop on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the Muftiate of Adygea and Krasnodar Territory.

[Continue reading...](#)

26.10.2021 - Patriarch Kirill (Gundyaev) awarded a group of officials, including a defendant in the EU sanctions list related to the poisoning of Alexei Navalny.

Link to full text in Russian: credo.press/239162/

The Order of Righteous Prince Daniel of Moscow III degree was awarded to Andrey Yarin, Head of the Presidential Department for Internal Policy of the Russian Federation, a graduate of the St. Petersburg University of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Russia. According [to the decision of the Council of the European Union of October 14, 2020](#), "Andrey Yarin is responsible for encouraging and supporting persons who have carried out or were involved in the poisoning of Alexei Navalny with the nerve agent "Novichok", which, according to the Convention on the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, is the use of chemical weapons." In this regard, Andrei Yarin was among the persons against whom the EU and the United Kingdom imposed personal sanctions.

26.10.2021 - Severe sentences draw renewed attention to Jehovah's Witnesses

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

A court in Astrakhan sentenced three adherents of the church of Jehovah's Witnesses to eight years in a penal colony, and another woman believer to three and a half years imprisonment. This was reported by a regional department of the Investigative Committee.

According to the bureau, after the prohibition of the organization in 2017 and before their arrest in June 2020, they "continued to arrange meetings," "used conspiratorial measures, including video conference links," and engaged in distribution of extremist literature.

[Continue reading...](#)

25.10.21 - Orthodox church leader regrets Putin's mortality

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

The FSB reported on October 4 about the detention in Moscow and the Moscow region of two leaders and six members of the Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami organization banned in the Russian Federation.

"The Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation, in cooperation with units of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Federal Service of the National Guard of the Russian Federation in the city of Moscow and the Moscow Region, suppressed the activities of a cell of the international terrorist organization" Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami "(banned in Russia by the decision of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation in 2003), two leaders and six of its active participants were detained, "the FSB's Public Relations Center (DSP) reports.

[Continue reading...](#)

25.10.21 - Court assigns longest prison terms yet to three Jehovah's Witnesses

Link to full text in Russian: <https://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/369454/>

A court in Astrakhan issued sentences of from 3.5 to 8 years in a penal colony to four Jehovah's Witnesses, having found them guilty of arranging, participating in, and financing an extremist organization.

As Kavkazskii Uzel has written, in June 2020 four persons in Astrakhan were arrested, who, according to information of security agents, were directing an underground cell of a forbidden religious organization. On 31 May 2021 investigators reported that the case had been delivered to a court.

[Continue reading...](#)

21.10.21 - Russian Supreme Court reports decline in application of anti-evangelism law

Link to full text in Russian: <https://cutt.ly/wRBJYn6>

On 18 October 2021 the Judicial Department under the Russian Supreme Court published statistical data on the number of cases considered by courts in the first six months of 2021 based on article 5.26 of the Code of Administrative Violations of Law of the R.F. (violation of legislation on freedom of conscience and freedom of religious confession and on religious associations).

According to these data, in the first six months a total of 153 cases based on this article were considered; this is fewer than in the similar period of the year 2020 (201).

[Continue reading...](#)

Misuse of anti-extremism and counter-terrorism laws denounced by SOVA Center at the OSCE

SOVA Center's statement for the session on "Promoting and protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms" at ODIHR 30th anniversary conference in Warsaw on October 14-15, 2021

SOVA (15.10.2021) - <https://bit.ly/3nzvqxS> - SOVA Center for Information and Analysis, whose activity is focused on monitoring and analysis in the field of nationalism and xenophobia and Russia, relations between the state and religious organizations in Russia and misuse of anti-extremism and counter-terrorism laws in the country, is deeply concerned by the ongoing deterioration of freedom of expression, freedom of association and freedom of belief in the country.

Vague and problematic definition of "extremism" in Russian law gives the authorities the latitude to ban a wide range of organizations, be they political or religious, as extremist, and we see a growing number of organizations on the extremists' list.

Simultaneously, those deemed "involved in extremist activities" face exceeding deprivation of their civil and political rights. Thus, a new law was introduced in anticipation of the elections prohibiting those "involved" in activities of extremist or terrorist organizations from being election candidates. The ban issued against Alexei Navalny's organizations – which is patently improper, since it does not fit even the vague formulas of the law on extremism – provided the authorities with the opportunity to

exclude the majority of the Russian opposition from the parliamentary election process and this opportunity was seized in full scale.

The Russian law on extremism criminalizes any activities which can be seen as analogous to activities of a banned organization. While Navalny's supporters are on the threshold of criminal prosecutions for their opposition activities seen by the authorities as continuation of activities of extremist organizations, the adherents of "non-traditional" religious organizations have been facing such prosecutions on a massive scale. As of October, 2021, the number of Jehovah's Witnesses prosecuted in Russia for continuation of activities of their religious communities banned in 2017 as extremist, reached 547; the believers, including the elderly and disabled people, face long prison terms or restrictions of freedom and large fines. The prosecutions against Hizb ut-Tahrir Islamic party followers for participation in a terrorist organization are also ongoing. Though the party has never been involved in any violence in Russia, hundreds of Muslims all over the country, including Crimean Tatars, get prison terms of up to 24 years for involvement in Hizb ut-Tahrir.

SOVA Center reports hundreds of criminal convictions for online public statements a year, nearly 5000 thousand people punished a year under Code of Administrative Offenses for online publications and hundreds of thousands cases of blocking various banned content yearly.

The Russian legislation on internet control has expanded dramatically during the last three years.

Thus, at the very end of 2020, the law on mandatory filtering of inappropriate content on social networks was signed. According to the law, the authorities grant the status of a social network to services with a monthly audience of more than 500 thousand Russian users. Social networks are obligated to independently monitor information, the dissemination of which is banned in Russia and which is subject to extrajudicial blocking (including information that contains calls for mass riots, carrying out extremist activities or participation in unpermitted rallies, as well as alleged fakes, materials of "undesirable organizations" and links to them and statements "offensive for the authorities and the society"), accept complaints about such content and block it. In case of non-compliance social networks are to be punished with huge fines (from 1/10 to 1/5 of the proceeds, but no less than 8 million rubles for legal entities). In addition to the above-listed requirements for content removal or blocking, social networks are required to make sure that their resources are not used to violate the electoral legislation restrictions or "to defame a citizen or certain categories of citizens" based on their belonging to a certain group, including their place of work and political convictions. As of September, 2021, according to Russian courts, foreign companies should pay fines of about 130 million rubles (about one and a half million euro) in total for failure to remove the illegal content.

Simultaneously, a law was introduced to prevent social networks from censoring information that comes from pro-government Russian media. The owner of an information resource used by Russian citizens and legal entities is recognized as involved in human rights violations if the resource restricts dissemination of socially significant information in Russia "on the basis of nationality, language, origin, property ownership or job title, profession, place of residence or work, attitude toward religion and (or) in connection with the introduction by foreign states of political or economic sanctions against the Russian Federation, citizens of the Russian Federation or Russian legal entities," or restricts the right of Russian citizens to freely seek, receive, transmit, produce and distribute information by any legal means. The sanctions for non-compliance also imply huge fines.

If owners of foreign online resources fail to comply with the requirements of the Russian authorities, the state agency on telecom may restrict access to their resources completely or partially. Partial restriction in this context can mean slowing down the

Internet traffic. The traffic may be slowed by means of equipment installed by Russian internet providers under the “sovereign internet” law (2019) which allowed the authorities to manage the internet traffic in the country themselves, circumventing the providers.

Practically speaking, according to the new legislation, social networks must delete whatever the authorities think has to be deleted, and cannot delete whatever the authorities think should not be deleted. That is an extremely radical approach to web content regulation.

Recommendations

To the participating states:

We believe that the legislation and practice of countering terrorism and extremism (in terms of national legislation) need to be brought in line with the international human rights standards.

The legal definition of extremism in national legislations, if present, must be revised so that this concept refers only to actions connected in one way or another with the use of violence. The definitions of terrorist and extremist activity in the relevant laws should be as clear as possible to eliminate the chance for an expansive interpretation.

Freedom of conscience and belief as such should not be subject to additional restrictions within the framework of anti-terrorism or anti-extremist legislation, despite the fact that, in general, restrictions on civil rights and freedoms in order to protect the state security and the public security are permissible.

Criminal law articles relating to public statements should criminalize only statements that call for violence. Incitement to hatred based on group characteristics – such as race, ethnicity, religion, etc – may be an exception. The list of protected characteristics should not include any vague criteria, as the lack of clarity leads to abuse.

In any case, the wording and application of the relevant articles of the Criminal Code must meet the threshold of public danger of the statements in question. Six part criteria presented in the Rabat Plan of Action can be used as an example.

Not only the states but also some civil society organizations often insist that online platforms delete all the undesirable content. But such content is too immense to be properly monitored and filtered. As a result, the online platforms delete plenty of content basing on absurd or formal criteria and fail to eliminate plenty of aggressive content. Supposedly, the stakeholders should look for consensus and make their anticipations more balanced and realistic.

To ODIHR:

ODIHR could renew and mediate a constructive dialogue between the participating states in all diversity of their anticipations and the global online platforms to elaborate more balanced and effective policies of online content regulation.

Rustam Diarov , Yevgeniy Ivanov, Sergey Klikunov and Olga Ivanova are Jehovah's Witnesses Nr 31, 32, 33 and 34 sentenced to prison in 2021

10.02.2021: Aleksandr Ivshin, 7.5 years
24.02.2021: Roman Baranovskiy, 6 years
24.02.2021: Valentina Baranovskaya, 2 years
29.03.2021: Viktor Stashevskiy, 6.5 years
30.03.2021: Oleg Danilov, 3 years
06.04.2021: Aleksandr Shcherbina, 3 years
20.05.2021: Rustam Seidkuliev, 2.5 years
28.05.2021: Anastasiya Polyakova 2.5 years - Gaukhar Bektemirova, 2.3 years - Dinara Dyusekeyeva, 2 years.
01.06.2021: Ekaterina Pegasheva, 6.5 years
03.06.2021: Andrei Stupnikov, 6 years
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)
29.07.2021: Alexander Parkov and Arsen Avanesov (6.5 years) and Vilen Avanesov (6 years)
13.08.2021: Vasiliy Meleshko, 3 years
06.09.2021: Dmitry Sergeyevich Terebilov, 3 years
23.09.2021: Valery Rogozin (6.5 years), Viacheslav Osipov and Denis Peresunko (6.3 years), Igor Egozarian and Sergei Melnik (6 years)
11.10.2021: Vladimir Skachidub (4.2 years)
22.10.2021: Igor Shmidt (6 years)
25.10.2021: Rustam Diarov (8 years), Yevgeniy Ivanov (8 years), Sergey Klikunov (8 years) and Olga Ivanova (3.5 years)

HRWF/ JW.ORG (26.10.2021) - On 25 October, a Russian court sentenced three Jehovah's Witness men [Rustam Diarov (48), Yevgeniy Ivanov (44), and Sergey Klikunov (46)] to 8 years in prison, while Yevgeniy's wife (Olga Ivanova, 38) was sentenced to 3.5 in prison. **Eight years is the longest, harshest* prison sentence for one of Jehovah's Witnesses (male) in Russia since the organization was banned as "extremist" in 2017. Olga's sentence is the longest for a female.**

How Did This Happen?

- **June 8, 2020**, A criminal case was launched against Rustam Diarov, Yevgeniy Ivanov, Olga Ivanova, and Sergey Klikunov. The men were all charged with organizing and financing extremist activities. Olga was charged with participation in extremist activities
- **June 9, 2020**, Over 100 security officials conducted raids on the homes of 27 families of Jehovah's Witnesses in the city of Astrakhan. Rustam, Yevgeniy, Olga, and Sergey were all placed in temporary detention
- **June 11, 2020**, Rustam, Yevgeniy, and Sergey were sent to a pretrial detention facility. Olga was placed under house arrest
- **October 25**, [Trusovskiy District Court of Astrakhan](#) sentenced them to prison. Olga was immediately taken in to custody.

Additional background on case Ivanov and others:
<https://jw-russia.org/cases/astrakhan.html#20211025>

See [link](#) for images. Please credit: Courtesy of Jehovah's Witnesses.

International Reactions

Natalia Prilutskaya, Amnesty International's Russia researcher, says: "Amnesty International is appalled with the news of yet another severe sentence under "extremism" related charges against four Jehovah's Witnesses in Astrakhan. Today, Trusovskiy District Court sentenced three men to 8 years imprisonment and a woman to 3.5 years. These are some of the harshest sentences issued so far against Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia since the Supreme Court declared Jehovah's Witnesses' organization to be "extremist" and banned it in 2017. The Russian authorities then pledged that believers would still be able to practice their faith but these promises rang hollow. The four Jehovah's Witnesses sentenced today are prisoners of conscience, prosecuted solely for their peaceful exercise of freedom of religion and expression, and must be released immediately and unconditionally. This wheel of repression against Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia must stop immediately."

Alexander Verkhovsky, director of Moscow-based Sova Center for Information and Analysis, says: "Real imprisonment for a woman, and real prison terms up to 8 years for men are further proofs of the growing cruelty in the campaign against Jehovah's Witnesses. The average punishment this year has been harsher than in the previous year."

Yaroslav Sivulskiy, spokesman for the European Association of Jehovah's Witnesses, says: "The sentences handed down today in Astrakhan are prime examples of how unscrupulous and inhumane some of Russia's judges are. They unhesitatingly ruin innocent lives by jailing believers who are internationally known as good citizens. Following the 2017 Supreme Court ruling, Russian authorities have repeatedly claimed that the personal beliefs of Jehovah's Witnesses are not banned. The judges in Astrakhan thus made a mockery of the rule of law. During the Soviet repression, Jehovah's Witnesses were imprisoned and exiled to Siberian labor camps on similar charges—for reading the Bible and talking about God with others. In 1991, the Russian government recognized that the Witnesses were peaceful people and that what had happened to them was ideological repression. Believers were rehabilitated and given compensation."

Jarrod Lopes, international spokesman for Jehovah's Witnesses, says: "We are appalled by today's ruling to imprison Rustam, Yevgeniy, and Sergey for a record eight years, as well as Yevgeniy's wife, Olga, for 3.5 years. Such harsh sentences are typically reserved for brazen, violent criminals.* It's patently absurd that a peaceful Christian can be imprisoned at all, let alone longer than a kidnapper or rapist! Russian authorities continue to unconscionably hunt down, and at times beat or torture,** peaceful Jehovah's Witnesses. They have raided 1,594 homes of Jehovah's Witnesses since 2017—even targeting handicapped and elderly ones, some as old as 90. Just this year, over 30 Jehovah's Witnesses have been convicted and imprisoned simply for peacefully practicing their Christian beliefs. We hope soon those responsible for the nationwide persecution will be stopped, so our fellow worshippers can enjoy the freedom of religion enshrined in Russia's constitution and guaranteed by international covenants that Russia is party to. Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia want nothing more than to peacefully live and worship in the country they call home as their fellow believers do in over 200 other lands."

*In comparison, according to [Article 111 Part 1 of the Criminal Code](#), grievous bodily harm draws a maximum of 8 years sentence; [Article 126 Part 1 of the Criminal Code](#), kidnapping leads to up to 5 years in prison; [Article 131 Part 1 of the Criminal Code](#), rape is punishable with 3 to 6 years in prison

**See recent reports by international rights groups/experts, [Forum18](#) and [Bitter Winter](#); as well as public denunciation by [U.S. State Department](#) on October 25.

Nationwide Persecution (Russia and Crimea)

- **257** criminal cases, involving **559** believers
- **70** in prison
- **31** under house arrest
- **1,594** homes of Witnesses raided since the 2017 Russian Supreme Court ruling that liquidated the Witnesses' legal entities in Russia and Crimea

Photo : Getty Images

Igor Shmidt is the 30th Jehovah's Witness sentenced to a prison term in 2021

A court in Crimea sentenced him to 6 years in prison



10.02.2021: Aleksandr Ivshin, 7.5 years
24.02.2021: Roman Baranovskiy, 6 years
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11.10.2021: Vladimir Skachidub (4.2 years)
22.10.2021: Igor Shmidt (6 years)

HRWF (23.10.2021) – On 22 October, a [Crimean court](#) sentenced 49-year-old Igor Shmidt to six years in prison under Russia's Criminal Code 282.2. He was accused of organizing the activities of an extremist organization. Prior to his sentencing, he spent nearly six months in pretrial detention (173 days) and some seven months under house arrest. Amnesty International's immediate response to today's ruling is condemning the sentence and calling on Russia to halt the nationwide ban (See below).

Igor Shmidt was born in 1972 in Lariak village (Tyumen region). He has a sister who currently lives abroad. After school, he graduated from a technical school in Nizhnevartovsk. He worked as an individual entrepreneur. In 2001, he moved to Sevastopol.

On 1 October 2020, in Sevastopol, security forces searched at least 9 local residents. The next day, the court sent four of them to jail, including Igor Schmidt. He was accused of organizing the activities of an extremist organization. Igor spent six months in a pre-trial detention center, after which he was transferred to house arrest. In April 2021, the judge of the Gagarinsky District Court of the city of Sevastopol, Lyudmila Tumaykina, began considering his case on the merits. In October 2021, the prosecutor requested 7 years in a general regime colony for Shmidt.

Natalia Prilutskaya, Amnesty International's Russia researcher, says: "Today's sentencing of 49-year-old Jehovah's Witness Igor Shmidt to six years imprisonment, under spurious charges of "organizing activities of an extremist organization," is another violent blow to freedom of religion in Crimea. Igor Shmidt is not an 'extremist' but a peaceful believer prosecuted for practicing his faith. Amnesty International considers him and all Jehovah's Witnesses as prisoners of conscience, deprived of their right to liberty solely in connection with the peaceful exercise of their right to freedom of religion. They must be immediately and unconditionally released and all charges against them dropped. The Russian authorities should respect, protect, promote, and fulfil the right to freedom of religion as enshrined in the country's Constitution and human rights treaties to which Russia is a state party. The prosecution and harassment of Jehovah's Witnesses must stop. Amnesty International is also calling on the Russian authorities to quash the judicial decision banning Jehovah's Witnesses' organizations as 'extremist,' review the anti-extremism legislation, and ensure that it is no longer used arbitrarily."

Rachel Denber, deputy director of Human Rights Watch's Europe and Central Asia division, says: "This is yet another shocking prison sentence against a member of the Jehovah's Witnesses for nothing more than peaceful religious activity. There have been dozens of others' prison sentences issued since Russian authorities banned

Jehovah's Witnesses as an "extremist", each one is a violation of the right to religious freedom. Igor Shmidt should be immediately freed, as should all other Jehovah's Witnesses behind bars for their religious activity."

Jarrold Lopes, spokesman for Jehovah's Witnesses, says: "Igor is the fourth one of Jehovah's Witnesses to be sentenced to prison for six or more years on baseless charges. Twelve other Jehovah's Witnesses in Crimea are facing criminal charges for their faith. Fueled by religious discrimination, Russian authorities continue to hunt down, and at times beat or torture, peaceful Jehovah's Witnesses. They've raided 1,594 homes of Jehovah's Witnesses since 2017—even targeting those handicapped and elderly ones, some as old as 90. We hope soon those responsible for the nationwide persecution will be stopped, so our fellow worshippers can enjoy the freedom of religion as guaranteed by the Russian constitution. Jehovah's Witnesses want nothing more than to peacefully worship in Russia and Crimea as they do in over 200 other lands."

Additional background on Igor's case:

<https://jw-russia.org/prisoners/shmidt.html>

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- **32** under house arrest
- **1,594** homes of Witnesses raided since the 2017 Russian Supreme Court ruling that liquidated the Witnesses' legal entities in Russia and Crimea

Picture: Shmidt, Igor Yakovlevich (Courtesy of Jehovah's Witnesses)

Belarus refuses to extradite to Russia Jehovah's Witness requesting political asylum

Novaya Gazeta/ Stetson Russia Religion News- (20.10.2021) - <https://bit.ly/3E0HKOI> - The office of the prosecutor general of Belarus refused to extradite to Russia the Jehovah's Witness Oleg Lonshakov, Mediazona* reports, citing the press service of the religious organization.

In Russia, Lonshakov is accused of creating an extremist organization (part 1, article 282.2 of the Criminal Code) and he has been placed on the international wanted list.

The believer was arrested on 29 September in Brest, where he has been for more than a year now on a residency permit. Several days later he was sent to the SIZO until 8 November. The Jehovah's Witnesses note that at the present Lonshakov has been released from the holding cell.

In September 2021, he filed a petition to receive the status of a refugee on the basis of religious confession. The Belarusian Ministry of Internal Affairs has promised to consider it in the coming weeks.

In April 2020, the Belarusian prosecutor general's office also refused to extradite to Russia an adherent of the Jehovah's Witnesses from Yugra, Nikolai Makhlichev, who had been arrested at Russia's request. The believer requested political asylum.

Prosecution of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia began in 2017 after the decision of the Supreme Court finding this organization extremist. Since then, criminal cases have regularly been opened against its adherents and searches of their homes have been conducted.

*The publication has been listed by the Ministry of Justice in the register of news media that perform the function of "foreign agent."

Special Bimonthly FORB digest (01-15.10.2021)

13.10.2021 - Searches at homes of Jehovah's Witnesses were again carried out in the Khabarovsk territory. At least two believers were detained

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/10/131059.html>

On the evening of October 11, 2021, searches were carried out in the homes of local believers in Nikolaevsk-on-Amur, including a 78-year-old woman. Two men were detained for 48 hours. Details are being specified.

[Continue reading...](#)

12.10.2021 - Oleg Danilov, imprisoned for his faith, unjustly sent to a punishment cell

Link to full text (only in Russian): <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/10/121612.html>

On 10 October, 2021 it became known that Oleg Danilov, serving his sentence for his Christian beliefs in the Akhtar colony, was unreasonably placed in a punishment cell. His detention in the penal cell was later extended by 15 days without any explanation.

[Continue reading...](#)

11.10.2021 - Pope Francis encourages Catholics in Russia to witness to the Gospel

As the Soviet Union was disintegrating 30 years ago, St. John Paul II appointed apostolic administrators for the pastoral care of Latin Rite Catholics in Moscow and Siberia.

[Continue reading...](#)

08.10.2021 - Tatarstan banned participation of minors in religious life without parental consent

Link to full text (only in Russian): <https://credo.press/239214/>
(Use <https://www.deepl.com/translator> for automatic translation)

In addition, TASS reports (<https://tass.ru/obschestvo/12606091>), it is forbidden to lead a religious group to foreign citizens in respect of whom a decision has been made that their stay on the territory of the Russian Federation is undesirable. A person convicted of extremism cannot become a leader either. Other restrictions have been introduced in line with the amendments to the federal law.

08.10.2021 - Community of Christians of Evangelical faith in Yalta fined for "illegal" missionary work

Link to full text (only in Russian): <https://credo.press/239213/>
(Use <https://www.deepl.com/translator> for automatic translation)

The reason for the initiation of the case was that the legal address of the religious organization is at the same time the address of residence of one of the community members, who did not know about the need to post visual information about the presence of a religious organization at this address. A community representative pleaded guilty.

08.10.2021 - A play about a Muslim woman Kisyakbik Bayryasova, who was burned for refusing to convert to Orthodoxy, canceled in Bashkortostan

Link to full text in Russian: <https://credo.press/239216/>

The premiere of the performance took place on September 25 at the M. Karim National Youth Theater in Ufa. However, they decided not to show it to Sterlitamak viewers. The management of the theater explained this for technical reasons, but the actors published a video filmed the day before the cancellation of the performance. On it, the theater staff communicates with the historian Ramil Rakhimov, who emphasizes that he came to the meeting at the request of the Minister of Culture of the Republic, Amina Shafikova. Rakhimov explains to the actors from the stage that history today is "a very painful thing."

[Continue reading...](#)

07.10.2021 - After searches in Irkutsk, six Jehovah's Witnesses were placed in a pre-trial detention center, another under house arrest

Link to full text in Russian: <https://credo.press/239195/>

The issue of choosing a preventive measure for the detained believers was decided in the Irkutsk court on October 5 and 6. On the first day, about 300 people gathered outside the courthouse, wishing to support their fellow believers. After a while, they were approached by believing women living nearby, who learned that there were believers in court. They brought hot tea with them to support the "prisoners of conscience."
The mass resettlement of Jehovah's Witnesses to the Irkutsk Region took place in 1951 as part of Stalin's Operation North. As you know, in April 2017, the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation declared extremist and liquidated all 396 religious organizations of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia.

07.10.2021 - The ECB Church from the Kabardian city of Nartkaly was brought to trial for "illegal missionary work"

Link to full text (only in Russian) : <https://credo.press/239199/>
(Use <https://www.deepl.com/translator> for automatic translation)

Kabardino-Balkaria is the leader in the North Caucasus in terms of the number of cases against representatives of Protestant confessions on being prosecuted under a "missionary article." According to the open data of SAS "Justice", since the beginning of 2021, at least seven such protocols have been received by the courts of the Republic.

07.10.2021 - More Baptists from Caucasus violate anti-evangelism law

Link to full text (only in Russian) : <https://cutt.ly/bRodMrl>

The Urvan district court of Kabardino-Balkaria will consider an administrative case against a church of Evangelical Christians-Baptists of the city of Nartkala.

An affidavit regarding the local religious organization has been composed on the basis of part 3 of article 5.26 of the Code of Administrative Violations of Law ("Conducting the activity of a religious organization without indicating its full official name"); it provides for a fine of from 30 to 50 thousand rubles.

[Continue reading...](#)

05.10.2021 - Baptist pastor in Kabardino-Balkaria fined for "illegal" missionary work

Link to full text in Russian: credo.press/239162/

As reported by the IAC "Sova" (recognized by the authorities of the Russian Federation as a foreign agent, but will appeal this status), on October 3 it became known that the magistrate court in the capital of Kabardino-Balkaria fined Igor Sashnikov, pastor of the local religious organization of Evangelical Christians-Baptists "Good News" under Art. 5.26 of the Code of Administrative Offenses of the Russian Federation (violation of legislation on freedom of conscience, freedom of religion and on religious associations). The pastor appealed to the Nalchik City Court to appeal this decision.

05.10.2021 - Appeal in Rostov-on-Don upheld the sentence against 60-year-old believer Olga Ganusha

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/10/011414.html>

On September 30, 2021, the panel of judges of the Rostov Regional Court rejected the appeal of Olga Ganusha from Rostov-on-Don on the conviction for her choice of religion. The believer still insists on her innocence. She has the right to appeal against the sentence that has entered into force in cassation procedure, as well as in international instances.

[Continue reading...](#)

04.10.21 - FSB detained in Moscow and Moscow region a group of supporters of the idea of an Islamic caliphate

Link to full text in Russian: <https://credo.press/239145/>

The FSB reported on October 4 about the detention in Moscow and the Moscow region of two leaders and six members of the Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami organization banned in the Russian Federation.

"The Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation, in cooperation with units of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Federal Service of the National Guard of the Russian Federation in the city of Moscow and the Moscow Region, suppressed the activities of a cell of the international terrorist organization" Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami "(banned in Russia by the decision of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation in 2003), two leaders and six of its active participants were detained, "the FSB's Public Relations Center (DSP) reports.

[Continue reading...](#)

03.10.21 - Russian religion law amended

Link to full text in Russian: <https://cutt.ly/HRogz3A>

Changes in the Russian federal law "On freedom of conscience and religious associations," forbidding individual persons to be a leader or member of a religious group, take legal effect as of 3 October.

This involves the federal law "On introducing changes in the federal law 'On freedom of conscience and religious associations,'" which was adopted in the spring and signed by Russian President Vladimir Putin in April of this year.

[Continue reading...](#)

03.10.21 - Anti-evangelism law still being used against protestants

Link to full text in Russian: <https://cutt.ly/IRogV1C>

A Nalchik city court will consider the administrative case of violation by missionary activity that was opened against Igor Sashnikov. He is the pastor of the local "Good News" religious organization of Evangelical Christians-Baptists.

Initially an affidavit based on the article of the Code of Administrative Violations of Law "Conduct of activity by a religious organization without an indication of its full official name" was considered by a magistrate court, but that was disputed by the defendant being charged with administrative accountability in the higher Nalchik city court. It will be considered by federal Judge Tempiuko Bgazhnokov.

[Continue reading...](#)

01.10.2021 - Russia blackballs Scientologists

Link to full text in Russian: <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=77878>

The Russian Ministry of Justice entered into the register of undesirables the American Scientology organizations "L. Ron Hubbard Library" and "WISE [World Institute of Scientology Enterprises]," whose activity had earlier been recognized by the office of the prosecutor general as threatening the security of the Russian Federation.

[Continue reading...](#)

Vladimir Skachidub is the 29th Jehovah's Witness sentenced to a prison term in 2021

HRWF (14.10.2021) – On 11 October, Vladimir Skachidub, a 59-year-old Jehovah's Witness, was convicted and sentenced to four years and two months of detention in a penal colony of medium security by the Pavlovskiy District Court of Krasnodar Territory.

He was found guilty of participating in the activity of an extremist organization (part 2 of article 282.2 of the Criminal Code of the R.F.) and drawing new members into it (part 1.1 of article 282.2 of CC RF). According to the account of the investigation, he participated "in religious educational events—classes and sermons," during which "he spread the ideology" of Jehovah's Witnesses, the rights advocates explained.

On 29 April 2020, security agents had conducted a search of the home of Vladimir Skachidub, with a group 3 disability, and his wife, Galina, with a group 2 disability. Two months later, the F.S.B opened a criminal case against Skachidub. The investigation called the meetings of believers and conversations about the Bible "dangerous for society and the state," and the investigator Vitaly Veter accused Skachidub of "performing the role of a preacher."

During one hearing, Skachidub told the court: "I am a Jehovah's Witness and I am being prosecuted solely for my peaceful religious activities. [...] I face imprisonment only for the fact that I simply exercised my right to profess religion."

In his final word, he declared his innocence. "My conscience is pure. I did not do anything evil against people nor against the state. And in God's eyes I will walk out of here acquitted," Skachidub said.

Persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses believers began in 2017 after a Supreme Court decision finding this organization extremist. Since then, criminal cases have been regularly opened against them and searches in their homes have been conducted.

Jarrold Lopes, spokesman for Jehovah's Witnesses at their world headquarters in New York, says:

"Judge Olga Marchenko ruthlessly imprisoned Vladimir, a disabled 59-year-old man, on baseless charges. Imprisoning a peaceful Christian family man like him is a mockery of the rule of law. Additionally, it is a travesty that he will be separated from his wife, Galina, also disabled. In 2017, Russia's Supreme Court targeted the Witnesses' legal entities, unjustly liquidating them in Russia and Crimea. Russian and Crimean authorities, though, would like the world to think that the ruling also banned Jehovah's Witnesses from practicing their faith. But that's simply not true. The 2017 ruling in no way overrides Russia's Constitution that protects the Witnesses right to practice their personal beliefs. We hope soon Russian authorities will live up to their national and international human rights obligations and halt this persecution. Jehovah's Witnesses want nothing more than to peacefully worship in Russia and Crimea as they do in over 200 other lands."

Crackdown in Krasnodar Territory

- April 2020, Russian security forces raided nine homes of Jehovah's Witnesses, including the Skachidub's, in Krasnodar Territory villages Pavlovskaya and Kholmanskaya
- July 2020, Vladimir Skachidub was added to the Federal extremist list
- 11 separate criminal cases subsequently involving 16 Jehovah's Witnesses from aforementioned villages
- Thus far, 5 Witnesses have been convicted and imprisoned—63-year-old Alexander Ivshin received most severe sentence of 7.5 years

Nationwide Persecution (Russia and Crimea)

- **252** criminal cases, involving **547** believers
- **68** in prison (the most since 2017 Supreme Court ruling)
- **32** under house arrest
- **1,583** homes of Witnesses raided since the 2017 Supreme Court ruling that liquidated the Witnesses' legal entities

Persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses escalates to torture

In Irkutsk, believers were badly beaten and threatened with rape by special forces agents.

By Massimo Introvigne

Bitter Winter (12.10.2021) - <https://bit.ly/30h4IHT> - On Monday last week, starting at 6 a.m., twelve private homes in Irkutsk, Siberia, were raided by OMON (Отряд Мобильный Особого Назначения, "Special Purpose Mobile Unit"), a force specialized in suppressing riots and confronting terrorists.

Who lived in the raided homes? Terrorists? Organized crime godfathers? Surprisingly, OMON was asked by Moscow to intervene to apprehend members of one of the most peace-loving religious organizations in the world, the Jehovah's Witnesses.

OMON, which has been created in Soviet times as an anti-terrorist special force (originally, to prevent terrorist attacks at the 1980 Moscow Olympics), has been repeatedly denounced for human rights abuses and even [extra-judicial killings](#).

In one of the homes they raided in Irkutsk, 31-year-old Anatoly Razdobarov lived with his wife, Greta, OMON agents forced Anatoly to the floor, and handcuffed him with his arms behind his back. They asked him to confess that he had committed criminal acts, and to inform them on other believers. When Anatoly refused, they started torturing him, kicking him in the head and kidneys. Then they grabbed his handcuffed hands, and wrenched him up off the ground, so that his body hyper-extended his shoulders

As Anatoly continued to resist, the OMON officers threatened to sodomize him, and tried to force a glass bottle in his buttocks. He was in the power of OMON for some eight hours, after which he was released.

Anatoly obtained a medical certificate documenting his torture, and filed a complaint against the actions of the law enforcement officers with the Investigative Committee and the Prosecutor's Office, and informed the Commissioner for Human Rights in the Russian Federation

His wife Greta was dragged by her hair into another room, handcuffed with her arms behind her back, and beaten. Only after thirty minutes, she was untied and allowed to get dressed.

Meanwhile, other OMON officers were at work in the home of Nikolay Merinov, a 23-year-old Jehovah's Witness, and his wife Liliya. Nikolay was hit in the face with a heavy object, fell, and lost his consciousness. An officer then sat on the top of him and beat him. His teeth were broken, as documented by the medical examination he underwent after he was released.

His wife, who was in her underwear, was dragged out of bed by her hair, handcuffed, and beaten. She also obtained a medical certificate documenting her injuries.

On Tuesday and Wednesday, the local courts ordered the pre-trial detention for two months of six of the Jehovah's Witnesses, Yaroslav Kalin, Mikhail Moish, Aleksey Solnechny, Sergey Kosteev, Nikolay Martynov, and Andrey Tolmachev, and the house arrest of 70-year-old Sergey Vasilyev.

Since the 2017 "liquidation" of the Jehovah's Witnesses by the Russian Supreme Court, 1,583 homes of believers have been raided. 61 of them are in prison, and 31 under house arrest. The persecution of a peaceful religious community has been denounced by several international institutions. The Irkutsk incident confirms that, when persecution and hate against a religious minority start, torture is never far away.

HRWF Comment

More information in JW.ORG and Credo Press

Photo: *OMON special police agents.* [Credits.](#)

Russia sanctioned for detaining a Scientologist

The European Court of Human Rights' Kuropyatnik decision is a clear message to Russian authorities: stop persecuting Scientology.

By Massimo Introvigne

Bitter Winter (10.10.2021) - <https://bit.ly/3lqyug6> - There is nothing new when Russia loses freedom of religion or belief (FORB) cases at the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) in Strasbourg, and there is unfortunately also nothing new when it ignores the decisions and goes on with its anti-FORB policies, Just ask the Jehovah's Witnesses.

However, there is something new in *Kuropyatnik v. Russia*, a case decided on September 28, 2021, and now widely commented by legal scholars. Against a vigorous but ultimately unsuccessful defense by Russian representatives, the ECHR stated that the detention of a Scientologist for the mere fact of being active in his religion was unlawful.

On October 13, 2010, Vladimir Leonidovich Kuropyatnik, at that time well-known as a Scientologist, took a flight back from Khanty-Mansiysk, in Western Siberia, to Moscow. When he landed at Vuknovo Airport, he was intercepted and taken to the local police station for questioning. There, he was interrogated for more than one hour about his activities in the Church of Scientology.

Kuropyatnik learned that his name had been included in the "Surveillance Database" (Сторожевой контроль), a police database used to track movements across Russia of individuals allegedly involved in "extremist" activities. Whenever a person included in the database purchases a train or plane ticket, the police is notified. Scientology's material was, and is, considered "extremist" in Russia, a country that has been repeatedly censored internationally for its cavalier use of the label "extremism" and for "inventing extremists" to discriminate against religious minorities.

Kuropyatnik believed that his detention had been unlawful, and filed a complaint with the Solntsevskiy District Court in Moscow. The complaint was dismissed by the District Court on March 2, 2011, and the decision was upheld by the Moscow City Court. The judges concluded that the police had acted in accordance with the law, and that Kuropyatnik had followed the police officers voluntarily.

Kuropyatnik then challenged his inclusion in the Surveillance Database, and again his case was dismissed by the Moscow City Court on September 16, 2011, on the ground that the issue had been solved in the meantime by deleting his name from the database. Although Kuropyatnik had sought a decision that registering him in the database had been illegal when it was done, the Supreme Court of Russia upheld the decision on December 7, 2011.

Kuropyatnik then moved to submit the case to the ECHR. In contrast to Russian courts, which produced four judgements in one year, the ECHR took nine years to come to a decision, which is usual in Strasbourg but sometimes makes its rulings less effective. At any rate, it found in favor of Kuropyatnik.

Here, we find something new. The objection by Russia that Kuropyatnik had not been detained but had voluntarily followed the police officers was quickly dismissed. The ECHR noted that Article 19.3 of the Russian Code of Administrative Offences makes declining an invitation by a police officer to go to a police station for questioning a crime punishable with both administrative fines and administrative detention. Clearly, Kuropyatnik was not free to refuse the "invitation," and although not technically "arrested," he was "detained."

Was this detention unlawful? Yes, the ECHR answered in the most interesting part of the decision. Russia's defense was based on two arguments. First, that including Kuropyatnik's name in the Surveillance Database was justified by reasons of national security, on which the ECHR cannot second-guess the national authorities. Second, that there was no violation of freedom of religion because Scientology is not a religion and therefore is not protected by Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

ECHR stated that how national security is protected finds a limit in articles 5 (right to liberty and security) and article 8 (respect for private and family life) of the European Convention of Human Rights. National security concerns cannot become a pretext to limit the liberty and violate the privacy of citizens who have not committed any crime, based only on their religious beliefs.

On the argument advanced by Russia that Scientology "is not a religion" the ECHR told Russia that it cannot have its cake and eat it too. At least until 2017, the ECHR observed, Russian courts and administrative authorities have consistently maintained that Scientology *is* a religion. In some cases, they did so to use against Scientology provisions against "religious extremism" that had been introduced to crack down on Islamic ultra-fundamentalism after both 9/11 and terrorist attacks on Russian soil.

The ECHR observed that Russia cannot at the same time call Scientology an "extremist religion" when it suits its purposes, noting that "the Russian authorities had repeatedly referred to Scientology as a religion to justify the imposition of restrictions on the Church of Scientology and its members," and claim that it is not a religion to exclude it from the protection granted by article 9 of the Convention. The ECHR also referred to its own previous decisions on Russian cases involving Scientology, where it had stated that Scientology is indeed a religion.

The ECHR awarded Kuropyatnik EUR 5,000 in respect of non-pecuniary damages, and EUR 3,000 in respect of costs and expenses, plus taxes and interests.

More importantly, it sent Russia a clear message that the persecution and discrimination against the Church of Scientology should be stopped. While precedents involving the Jehovah's Witnesses would support skepticism, one can only hope that Russia will hear the ECHR and understand that the persecution of Scientology is firmly condemned by the international community.

The message is for other countries, too. Registering a Scientologist (or a member of any other religion) in a police database, overtly or secretly, is discriminatory and illegal. It cannot be done without violating the European Convention on Human Rights.

Photo : *Vladimir Kuropyatnik at a Scientology function in 2016.* Source: [Scientology Newsroom](#).

Dmitry Muratov, the editor-in-chief of Novaya Gazeta, gets the Peace Nobel Prize

On 6 October, Novaya Gazeta published [an article about sexual abuse by clerics in the French Catholic Church AND the Russian Orthodox Church](#) (Use the automatic translation on their website). HRWF's newsletter partly reproduced it in English on 8 October. Read it [here](#).

Strong negative reactions of radical Russian Orthodox circles: [The United States declared war on the Russian Orthodox Church](#)

HRWF (09.10.2021) - On October 8, the Union of Orthodox Citizens (LNG) of the Russian Orthodox Church/ Moscow Patriarchate, headed by Valentin Lebedev, reacted very negatively to the report of the Nobel Committee about the presentation of the Peace Nobel Prize for 2021 to the editor-in-chief of Novaya Gazeta Dmitry Muratov and Filipino journalist Maria Ressa.

Statement of the Union of Orthodox Citizens about Peace Nobel Prize Muratov

"Novaya Gazeta is an anti-Russian and anti-Orthodox propaganda body. This is a 'signal' to Vladimir Putin, Patriarch Kirill and in fact also Ramzan Kadyrov and all supporters of traditional values.

Because the most loud and defamatory actions of this newspaper in recent years have been the fabrications of the correspondent Soldatov against the Russian Orthodox Church and insinuations on the issue of 'Chechen gays'.

Recently, according to our reports, there has been some relaxation in the top political leadership because they consider Biden a very weak and contractual figure. We are convinced that this is an extremely dangerous illusion.

Occupational, globalist, anti-Orthodox forces are waging a war against our Motherland in the field of media, education and upbringing right on the territory of Russia. They are so confident in victory that they do not hesitate to publicly reward and encourage the 'heroes' of this war."

Photo: Dmitry Muratov.

From sexual abuse in France's Catholic Church to Russia's Orthodox Church

The shock caused by the statistics of the Sauvé Report on sexual abuse perpetrated by clerics and laymen in the French Catholic Church – 330,000 victims and about 3000 perpetrators - has reverberated well beyond the borders of France.

In Russia, the well-known media Novaya Gazeta has published [a long paper about the French report and has wondered if the Russian Orthodox Church \(ROC\) was immune against this virus as its clergy can get married and defends](#)

'traditional values'. Apparently, it is not and its assessment is based on concrete cases.

Willy Fautré

[Novaya Gazeta](#) (06.10.2021) & [Credo Press](#) (07.10.2021) – Recent cases:

One of the most recent cases is the one of [Hieromonk Clement \(Korablev\)](#), rector of ROC parishes in the Assekeyevsky district of the Orenburg region, convicted in September. He was found guilty under three articles of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation (Part 3 of Article 132, § b of Part 4 of Article 132 and Part 1 of Article 151) related to minors under the age of 14. Hieromonk received 13 years in a maximum security colony.

His more famous neighbor in the Orenburg metropolitanate, [Archpriest Nikolai Stremsky](#), has been under investigation while in detention for two years. Once the church media promoted his image as the founder of the Saraktasha Monastery of Mercy and a loving father of dozens of adopted children. Vladimir Putin even visited the monastery. Now the venerable Archpriest is charged under paragraph b of Part 4 of Article 131 (rape), Part 3 of Article 135 (depraved actions), Article 156 (failure to raise a minor) of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation. According to the investigation, 11 children were injured by his actions. About 500 million rubles were arrested in the accounts of the archpriest.

The court in the Jewish Autonomous Region is considering the case of the rector and bell ringer of the temple in the village of Amurzet [Hieromonk Spiridon \(Abramov\)](#) and [Sergei Moos](#), whom the investigation accuses of corruption of 53 boys and even pornography.

Sentences of 13 to 17 years in prison

Among the last convicted clerics of the ROC are:

Priest Andrei Strebkov (Holy Trinity Church in Zainsk, Tatarstan; 13 years of strict regime,

[Hieromonk Andrei Tkachenko](#) (director of the St. Innokentievsky Orthodox Gymnasium in Yakutsk; 87 episodes, 17 years of a maximum security colony,

[Priest Gleb Grozovsky](#) (cleric of the Gatchina diocese, former confessor of FC Zenit, 14 years in a maximum security colony,

Archpriest Sergei Smolyakov (cleric of the Saran Diocese, torture of children and sexual violence, is under investigation.

Noteworthy, two ROC clerics convicted of pedophilia are said by Novaya Gazeta to have mysteriously died shortly after their conviction. These are [Andrei Kiselev](#), a priest of the Altai diocese, and Hieromonk Nikon (Kharkov) of the Kozel diocese.

Comment published by Novaya Gazeta & Credo (Translation)

"It is unlikely that the prerequisites for such crimes in the Orthodox environment are very different from those of the Catholic one. Often pedophilia grows as a "compensatory" deviation in people deprived of family and children. In Russian conditions, this often applies to people with homosexual orientation, for whom such neglect grows into an insoluble social problem: the Russian state does not recognize

homosexual unions in the foreseeable future (and the ROC - especially) and the possibility of adopting children does not shine on such people. To this can be added the closed environment of the "male order", which is formed in church institutions - in closed seminaries, monasteries, diocesan administrations, bishop's residences ... In such environments (remember prison or army), sexual mechanisms are sometimes used to build a hierarchy of subordination and co-dependency. To this we can add "pastoral burnout" - fatigue and disappointment from the ministry of the clergy generation who came to church in the 90s, and the completion of the "moda for the church", which was replaced by anticlerical moods. Someone has all these psycho-traumas and "tangles of contradictions" transform into deviant behavior that cannot be justified, but for which not only the criminal himself in the cassock is sometimes responsible.

Of course, homosexuality and pedophilia have nothing to do with each other (although Patriarch Kirill thinks otherwise:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kEL-ZyTHx4A>). Among the victims of pedophiles are children of both sexes. But special tabooing and stigmatization of homosexual problems in the church result in boys who make up the main percentage of victims...

The story of the Catholic Church's attempts to systematically deal with its "main challenge of the XXI century" recalls the advantages of an open society. That is what pushed the Church to conduct such investigations, which in the recent past was classified as "secret". In Russian conditions, such systematic work is very far away. The problem, despite its entire scale, is solved in two simple ways like felt boots: repression by the authorities and silence from the ROC.

At the end of the Soviet period, the ROC had only 18 monasteries. Now their number is approaching 2000. Monasteries are beginning to be divided into "classes" that have nothing to do with asceticism and hermitage. The "monastic" episcopate also presents a certain problem, which, as a rule, does not even come from these monasteries, but from "career" monasticism. And finally, the church life, a very closed world. All this creates the preconditions leading to the problems to which this article is devoted.

The ROC will also begin to apologize - when the society around him becomes freer. There's no one to apologize to yet? ...

Alexander Soldatov, ["NOVAYA GAZETA", October 6, 2021.](#)

HRWF Note

The hyperlinks to a number of clerics have been added by HRWF

Photo: EPA

Special Bimonthly FORB digest (16-30.09.2021)

28.09.2021 – Moscow officials demand from religious organizations information about priests trained abroad

Link to full text (only in Russian): <https://credo.press/239090/>

(Use <https://www.deepl.com/translator> for automatic translation)

Head of the Department of National Policy and Interregional Relations of the city of Moscow Vitaly Suchkov sent a letter to religious organizations asking for data on clergy and employees of religious organizations trained abroad, reports on September 28 [IAC "SOVA"](#), recognized by the Russian authorities as a foreign agent. The letters were sent out in anticipation of the entry into force of the next amendments to the Law of the Russian Federation "On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations".

25.09.2021 - Moscow 007s arrest 15 Taliban sympathisers

Four Tajiks and one Russian jailed; the others are being sent back to their countries of origin. According to the FSSB, they organised attacks "against the infidels". Together with China and Pakistan, the Kremlin has opened a channel of dialogue with the Afghan Taliban: it could come to regret it.

[Continue reading...](#)

24.09.2021 - Six to six and a half years in prison for the faith. Court in Volgograd sentenced four of Jehovah's Witnesses

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/09/240821.html>

On September 23, 2021, the Traktorozavodsky district court of Volgograd sentenced Valery Rogozin, Igor Yegozaryan, Sergey Melnik, and Denis Peresunko to long prison terms for praying and discussing the Bible with fellow believers. They were taken into custody and will be kept in pre-trial detention until the sentence comes into force.

[Continue reading...](#)

24.09.2021 - The General Prosecutor's Office of the Russian Federation declared Scientology an "undesirable organization"

Link to full text (only in Russian): <https://credo.press/239055/>
(Use <https://www.deepl.com/translator> for automatic translation)

The General Prosecutor's Office of the Russian Federation declared the World Institute of Scientology Enterprises and the Ron Hubbard Library undesirable organizations. As "Forbes" reports on September 24, the corresponding statement was published in the telegram channel of the department.

23.09.2021 - From October 3, the state will be able to ban clergymen. Russian legislation on religion has reached the point of absurdity

Link to full text (only in Russian): <https://credo.press/239040/>
(Use <https://www.deepl.com/translator> for automatic translation)

Another law, "On Amending the Federal Law 'On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations,'" will take effect soon, on 3 October 2021. Religious groups resonated with one of its clauses requiring clergy and personnel of religious organizations to undergo obligatory re-evaluation in Russia after receiving religious education abroad.

23.09.2021 - Five Jehovah's Witnesses sent to prison colony

Link to full text in Russian: <https://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/368386/>

A court in Volgograd issued real prison terms to five Jehovah's Witnesses, finding them guilty in a case regarding extremism. The defendants did not acknowledge guilt and they intend to appeal the verdict. Relatives of the convicts called the verdict expected.

Continue reading...

22.09.2021 - Pentecostal Bishop Albert Ratkin expelled from the Union of Christians of Evangelical Faith – Pentecostals after calling on the head of the Union to resign

Link to full text (only in Russian) : <https://credo.press/239038/>
(Use <https://www.deepl.com/translator> for automatic translation)

Pentecostal Bishop Albert Ratkin, who earlier made accusations against the leadership of the Russian United Union of Christians of Evangelical Faith - Pentecostals (ROSKhVE), was expelled from the union.

22.09.2021 - Believers' wedding ceremony became an event for the detention center in the Town of Anzhero-Sudzhensk. How religious persecution breaks the lives of innocent people

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/09/221614.html>

One of Jehovah's Witness Yuriy Usanov, 29, of the town of Tayga, had his pleasant pre-wedding troubles suddenly ended when he was taken to the penitentiary in April 2021 for his faith. His fiancée, Irina Yagunova, was long denied visitation until they were married on September 9, 2021 - right in the jail.

Continue reading...

22.09.2021 - The Muslim religious group Jamaat Red Plowman was added to the Russian register of terrorist organizations

Link to full text (only in Russian) : <https://credo.press/239025/>
(Use <https://www.deepl.com/translator> for automatic translation)

The Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation added the religious group *Krasny Pakhar Jamaat* to the register of terrorist organizations. The court ruling took effect on August 31.

Krasny Pakhar Jamaat became the 36th such group on the federal list of organizations declared terrorist groups in Russia.

22.09.21 - Three-year-old case against Jehovah's Witnesses delayed again

Link to full text in Russian: <https://credo.press/239017/>

On 16 September, a Shuya city court of Ivanovo oblast returned to the prosecutor the case of the Jehovah's Witnesses Dmitry and Elena Mikhailov, Svetlana Ryzhkova, Svetlana Shishinaia, and Aleksei Arkhipov. The court concluded that the indictment was composed with violations of the requirements of the Criminal Procedural Code, according to the SOVA Center for News and Analysis (which is considered by the authorities of the R.F. to be a foreign agent, but which challenges this decision).

[Continue reading...](#)

21.09.21 - Yet another prosecution of a Jehovah's Witness

Link to full text in Russian: <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=77836>

Investigators in Tambov opened a criminal case against a man suspected of arranging the activity of a religious organization that is forbidden in the R.F., the "Administrative Center of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia," the investigation department of the S.K.R. [Investigative Committee of Russia] for the region reports.

[Continue reading...](#)

21.09.2021 - Violent persecution mounting of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russian-occupied Crimea

Serhiy Lyulin [was seized](#) by FSB officers while in Russia, thrown into the boot of a minivan and driven, in handcuffs and bound with scotch tape, for 16 hours to occupied Simferopol. He is one of an ever-increasing number of Crimean Jehovah's Witnesses facing violent FSB 'operations' and imprisonment for worshipping together and discussing the Bible. Lyulin is now remanded in custody, in a 'special bloc' cell with world-respected Crimean Tatar leader and political prisoner Nariman Dzhelyal.

[Continue reading...](#)

16.09.21 - An appeal in Birobidzhan confirmed the verdict of Tatiana Zagulina. The believer was sentenced to 2.5 years of probation

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/09/161617.html>

On September 16, 2021, the court of the Jewish Autonomous Region did not satisfy the appeal of 37-year-old Tatyana Zagulina. The verdict entered into force - the believer was assigned 2 years and 6 months of suspended sentence and 2 years of restriction of freedom.

[Continue reading...](#)

Tabligh Jamaat and Said Nursi Muslims sentenced or fined for practising their religion

Misuse of the anti-extremism legislation in August

Sova Center (22.09.2021) - <https://www.sova-center.ru/en/misuse/news-releases/2021/09/d44952/> - In the second half of August, the Proletarsky District Court of Saransk in the Republic of Mordovia found Ryais Tyshkin and Aisu Aizatullin guilty under Article 282.2 Part 1 and fined them 500 thousand rubles. Khafiz Aizatullin was found guilty under Article 282.2 Part 2 of the Criminal Code and fined 300 thousand rubles. They were charged with creation of and participation in the activities of the Tablighi Jamaat "cell" in 2019. Tablighi Jamaat, a religious movement recognized as extremist, was banned in Russia in 2009 – in our opinion, without proper justification. The movement was engaged in the propaganda of fundamentalist Islam, but was never implicated in any calls for violence, and, therefore, we view prosecutions against its supporters as inappropriate.

In late August, the Volzhsky District Court of Saratov issued a two-year suspended sentence followed by six months of restriction of freedom to a Tablighi Jamaat follower from the Volgograd Region. He was found guilty under Article 282.2 Part 2 of the Criminal Code for disseminating the ideas of Tablighi Jamaat on the Internet in 2018.

Also in late August, the Naberezhnye Chelny City Court issued a two-year suspended sentence to 63-year-old Nakia Sharifullina under Article 282.2 Part 1 of the Criminal Code. The prosecutor's office requested seven years in prison for her. According to the investigation, in 2015, Sharifullina, being an adherent of the banned international religious association Nurcular, created a cell of this association and, under the guise of conducting Quran study sessions and Turkish language classes, gathered citizens and introduced them to the works of the Turkish Muslim theologian Said Nursi from the *Risale-i Nur* compilation, including the banned ones. Sharifullina was also convicted under the same article back in 2014 and fined 100 thousand rubles. We regard the ban against Nurcular, which, in fact, never existed in Russia at all, as inappropriate, and we oppose prosecuting Muslims who study the books of Said Nursi for their alleged membership in an extremist organization.

HRWF Footnote: We do not mention Hizb ut-Tahrir prisoners in our newsletter and in our Database of FORB prisoners because Hizb ut-Tahrir is a political party and we only focus on cases of violations of the practice of religion. The movement was banned in Russia as a terrorist organization. The Russian NGO SOVA Center considers that this ban is inappropriate since it has never been implicated in violence and we agree with SOVA. SOVA considers prosecutions against Hizb ut-Tahrir members under the "terrorist" Criminal Code articles based solely on their political party activities (holding meetings, reading literature, etc.) inappropriate as well.

Photo: www.shutterstock.com.106529405

28 Jehovah's Witnesses sentenced to prison in 2021: Valery Rogozin, Sergei Melnik, Igor Egozarian, Viacheslav Osipov, and Denis Peresunko are Nr 24, 25, 26, 27, 28

HRWF (27.09.2021) -
10.02.2021: Aleksandr Ivshin, 7.5 years

24.02.2021: Roman Baranovskiy, 6 years
24.02.2021: Valentina Baranovskaya, 2 years
29.03.2021: Viktor Stashevskiy, 6.5 years
30.03.2021: Oleg Danilov, 3 years
06.04.2021: Aleksandr Shcherbina, 3 years
20.05.2021: Rustam Seidkuliev, 2.5 years
28.05.2021: Anastasiya Polyakova 2.5 years - Gaukhar Bektemirova, 2.3 years - Dinara Dyusekeyeva, 2 years.
01.06.2021: Ekaterina Pegasheva, 6.5 years
03.06.2021: Andrei Stupnikov, 6 years
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)
29.07.2021: Alexander Parkov and Arsen Avanesov (6.5 years) and Vilen Avanesov (6 years)
13.08.2021: Vasiliy Meleshko, 3 years
06.09.2021: Dmitry Sergeyevich Terebilov, 3 years
23.09.2021: Valery Rogozin (6.5 years), Viacheslav Osipov and Denis Peresunko (6.3 years), Igor Egozarian and Sergei Melnik (6 years)

Russia Religion News (23.09.2021) - <https://bit.ly/3zMclTz> - A court in Volgograd issued real prison terms to five Jehovah's Witnesses, finding them guilty in a case regarding extremism. The defendants did not acknowledge guilt and they intend to appeal the verdict. Relatives of the convicts called the verdict expected.

As Kavkazskii Uzel has written, the five Jehovah's Witnesses defendants from Volgograd accused of extremism declared in court that they did not participate in the activity of an organization that has been banned by a court. The prosecution asked for them to be sentenced to incarceration for from seven to nine years. Relatives of the defendants pointed out that in the event of real prison terms, the families of the Volgograd Jehovah's Witnesses will be left without breadwinners. In their final statements the defendants declared their innocence and asked the court to acquit them.

The Jehovah's Witnesses Valery Rogozin, Sergei Melnik, Igor Egozarian, Viacheslav Osipov, and Denis Peresunko were charged with membership in an organization that a court has ruled to be extremist. But they themselves insist that they are not members of a legal entity that has been forbidden by a court but they simply profess their own religion. According to the believers' defense attorneys, evidence was presented in court that had nothing to do either with the essence of the charges or with the religious views of the defendants, and the religious studies expert analysis did not explain what the extremism with which the believers were charged consisted of.

Igor Egozarian and Sergei Melnik each received six years in a medium security prison colony; Viacheslav Osipov and Denis Peresunko each received six years and three months, and Valery Rogozin received six years and five months, the attorney Roman Levin told a Kavkazskii Uzel correspondent.

"The verdict has still not been delivered, but it was announced. I think that the court drew conclusions about the leadership role of Rogozin, and therefore he got more. Osipov, Peresunko, and Rogozin were charged with two crimes, and Egozarian and Melnik were charged with one crime," the lawyer noted. He said the defense will appeal the verdict.

The verdict was read out for five and a half hours; the reading was attended also by relatives of the accused, Levin explained. He said that the convicts were taken into custody in the courtroom.

The evidence assembled by the investigation was found by the court to be sufficient to support the sentence of the five members of the religious organization professing and propagating the teachings of Jehovah's Witnesses. All of the defendants were found to be guilty of arranging the activity of an extremist organization (part 2 of article 282.2 of the Russian Criminal Code), and three of them also were found guilty of financing extremist activity (part 1 of article 282.3 of the Russian Criminal Code), a Kavkazskii Uzel correspondent was told by the senior assistant director of the department for relations with news media of the investigation department of the S.K.R. for Volgograd oblast, Natalia Rudnik.

"The investigation and court established that the convicts, who knew for certain that back in the spring of 2017 the activity of the religious organization 'Administrative Center of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia' had been ruled to be extremist by a decision of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation, from March of 2018, by means of conspiracy, arranged in the region mass events at which they not only actively promoted the exclusivity and superiority of a forbidden ideology, but also in the guise of voluntary contributions collected money from participants in the meetings, which, as investigators allege, was disbursed for the needs of an extremist organization, enabling its activity," Rudnik declared.

Besides imprisonment, the convicts are deprived of the right to hold leadership positions in public and religious organizations over the course of four years, Pudnik noted.

The convicts had the possibility of terminating the activity of the organization, but "knowing for certain about the ban on its activity on Russian territory" and "realizing the public danger and illegality of their actions, in the form of undermining the foundations of the constitutional order and security of the state," "acting as a group of persons, they continued to arrange the activity of an extremist organization," the press service of the Traktorzavod court of Volgograd reported today.

Three of the convicts, "acting intentionally from extremist motives, as a joint criminal conspiracy, undertook actions for collection of money deliberately intended for enabling the activity of extremist organizations," the report of the court's website states. "In all, in the period from 17 July 2017 to 16 May 2019 (they) collected for enabling the activity of the religious organization 'Administrative Center of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia' and the local religious organization of Jehovah's Witnesses of the Traktorzavod district of Volgograd, that had been ruled to be extremist, at least 140,670 rubles. The defendants did not acknowledge they were guilty of the charge presented, pointing out that faith cannot be forbidden," the report says.

For the reading of the verdict, one relative for each was admitted into the courtroom, Sergei Melnik's wife, Anna, explained. "They were taken into custody in the courtroom. Today they will be put into a temporary holding cell and tomorrow into a SIZO; then they will be transported to SIZO-3 in Frolovo, and there they will await the appellate hearing. We had hoped that maybe there would be a suspended sentence, because they had not been previously convicted of criminal responsibility and they had totally positive character references. When the judge read the verdict she said that all the arguments of the defense were unreasonable. . . . We had hoped to the last for a lighter sentence. On the other hand, such a verdict was expected," she told a Kavkazskii Uzel correspondent.

Anna Melnik said that the defendants reacted to the sentence calmly. "Because they understood that this is, one may say, a political order," she noted.

Anna Melnik noted that other relatives present in the court "do not have the strength" to make comments. She reported that Igor Egozarian's mama, who is already over 80 years old, was in court.

Valery Rogozin's son Vadim considered the verdict expected, although he called the case "picked out of thin air." "It was clear that in any case there would be a guilty verdict; we did not expect acquittal. We had hoped that if they wanted to imprison them they would not be taken from the SIZO originally. We thought maybe they would give them a suspended sentence or a fine. But to imprison them for six years. I consider that that is nonsense in the context of Russia as a whole. There was no victim. Why such prison terms?" the son of the convicted Jehovah's Witness commented on the verdict. (tr. by PDS, posted 23 September 2021)

Russian version: [Kavkazskii Uzel, 23 September 2021](#)

*Photo: Valery Rogozin, one of the five JW sentenced to prison on 23 September
Courtesy: JW.ORG*

Dmitry Terebilov is the 23rd Jehovah's Witness sentenced to a prison term in 2021

HRWF (20.09.2021) - Dmitriy Terebilov is the 23rd Jehovah's Witness to be sentenced to a prison term this year.

Terebilov was born in 1980 in Kostroma. Being the only child in the family, he lost his mother early. When he was young, he was fond of freestyle wrestling and boxing, spent a lot of time on the street with friends.

He had a difficult period in his life — he had several criminal convictions. While behind bars, he decided to read the Bible for the first time in his life. It was a discovery and he decided to immediately apply what he learned. The positive changes in the prisoner impressed the administration of the correctional institution so much that they petitioned for his early release. He managed to get out of prison before the end of his term because of his good behaviour, left his old way of life and became a Jehovah's Witness.

In 2015, he got married with Irina, a Jehovah's Witness.

In July 2018, police officers, together with an OMON detachment, broke into the front door and entered the entrance of Dmitry Terebilov's house. While the owner was not at home, the security forces searched his apartment.

A year later, in June 2019, the Investigation Department for the Central District of Kostroma of the Investigative Directorate of the Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation for the Kostroma Region initiated a criminal case for faith under Art. 282.2 (2). According to the investigation, Dmitry Terebilov (born 1980) "distributed ... literature included in the federal list of extremist materials, containing information inciting religious discord, propagandizing the exclusivity, superiority of the doctrine of Jehovah's Witnesses and the inferiority of other citizens who do not profess this doctrine ... participation in the meetings held ". He was then placed on recognizance not to leave. His bank account was blocked, as the believer was added to the Rosfinmonitoring List of Terrorists and Extremists.

In September 2020, hearings began in the Sverdlovskiy District Court of Kostroma. The case was considered by judge Oksana Borovkova, then it was transferred to Elena Molodova. On 22 July 2021, the prosecutor asked the court to send Dmitry Terebilov to a strict regime colony for 5 years. On September 6, 2021, the court sentenced Dmitry to 3 years in a strict regime colony. He is currently detained in FKU SIZO-1 of the Federal Penitentiary Service of Russia for the Kostroma Region, 88 Sovetskaya st., Kostroma, 156005. Letters of support can be sent to him at this address.

See the timeline of his case [here](#).

Jehovah's Witnesses convicted and sentenced to prison in 2021

10.02.2021: Aleksandr Ivshin, 7.5 years
24.02.2021: Roman Baranovskiy, 6 years
24.02.2021: Valentina Baranovskaya, 2 years
29.03.2021: Viktor Stashevskiy, 6.5 years
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03.06.2021: Andrei Andreyev, Andrei Ryshkov, Armen Bagratyan, and Alevtina Bagratyan (from 2 to 4.5 years in prison)
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13.08.2021: Vasiliy Meleshko, 3 years
06.09.2021: Dmitry Sergeyeovich Terebilov, 3 years

Biased coverage of the case by Interfax-Religion in Russia

As usual, Interfax-Religion in Russia covered this new case against a Jehovah's Witness in such a way that the readers of their news service will understand Jehovah's Witnesses are extremists and criminals, hide hate speech material against other religions and have in their ranks drug addicts or drug dealers.

Interfax-Religion never criticizes the ban of their movement by the Russian government and its blacklisting as an extremist organization. It never echoes the international criticisms of the Russian legislation in this regard and its implementation as a violation of the international human rights standards.

Photo: Dmitriy Sergeyeovich Terebilov – jw.org

Special bimonthly FORB digest (01-15.09-2021)

14.09.21 - A new wave of searches of Jehovah's Witnesses took place near the Chinese border in Russia

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/09/141137.html>

On September 10, 2021, the Border Guard Department of the Federal Security Service of Russia in Primorye Territory conducted four searches in the homes of Jehovah's Witnesses living near the Chinese border. It is not yet known whether a criminal case has been opened or whether the searches were conducted as part of operational and investigative activities.

[Continue reading...](#)

12.09.21 - An appeal in the Amur region upheld the verdict on believer Konstantin Moiseenko — 6 years probation for convictions

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/09/091456.html>

On September 9, 2021, the Amur Regional Court upheld the verdict of the first instance court. Jehovah's Witness Konstantin Moiseenko was sentenced to 6 years of conditional sentence with a following probation period of 4 years and an additional restriction of liberty for 1 year.

[Continue reading...](#)

12.09.21 - In Birobidzhan Andrey Gubin, one of Jehovah's Witnesses, is sentenced to 2 years and 6 months probation for faith in God

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/09/091608.html>

On September 9, 2021, the judge of the Birobidzhan District Court, Yuliya Tsykina, sentenced 47-year-old Andrey Gubin to 2 years and 6 months of conditional sentence, 2 years of probation and 1 year of restraint of liberty. The believer immediately appealed against this decision.

[Continue reading...](#)

10.09.21 - RUSSIA: suspended sentence, though she did "nothing apart from study Koran"

After a trial lasting more than six months, Naberezhnyye Chelny City Court in Tatarstan handed 63-year-old Nakiya Sharifullina a two-year suspended sentence on 31 August on "extremism" charges to punish her for meeting with others to study the works of Muslim theologian Said Nursi. The case followed police raids on the homes of 20 women in March 2020. Sharifullina, who has "a number of serious illnesses", denied any guilt and insisted she had done "nothing apart from study the Koran", her lawyer Ruslan Nagiyev noted. He has lodged an appeal. Seven Jehovah's Witnesses have been given prison terms on extremism-related charges since late June.

[Continue reading...](#)

08.09.21 - New case opened against Jehovah's Witness in Cheliabinsk

Link to full text in Russian: <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=77777>

A criminal case has been opened against a resident of Cheliabinsk oblast who is suspected of arranging the activity of the religious organization of Jehovah's Witnesses, which is forbidden in Russia, the press service of the regional investigation department of the S.K.R. reports.

[Continue reading...](#)

07.09.21 - Prosecutor raises requested punishment for five Jehovah's Witnesses

Link to full text in Russian: <https://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/367856/>

In their final word, five Volgograd Jehovah's Witnesses declared their innocence and asked the court to acquit them, attorney Roman Levin reported.

As Kavkazskii Uzel has written, on 10 December the court permitted the Volgograd Jehovah's Witnesses to leave their houses but it left the prohibition on use of the telephone and internet. It is difficult for the defendants to find work while the investigation is going on, the wife of one of them explained.

[Continue reading...](#)

07.09.21 - Reformed ex-con Jehovah's Witness sentenced a second time

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

On 6 September, the Sverdlovsk district court of Kostroma sentenced Jehovah's Witness Dmitry Terebilov to three years in a high-security penal colony. OVD-Info was told this in the press service of the European Association of Jehovah's Witnesses.

The 39-year-old Terebilov was found guilty on the basis of the article about participation in the activity of an extremist organization (part 2, article 282.2 of C.C.). According to the account of the investigation, he distributed literature that is included in the list of extremist materials.

[Continue reading...](#)

07.09.21 - The appeal in Krasnoyarsk upheld the sentence to Andrey Stupnikov – the believer was sent to a colony for six years

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/09/071917.html>

On September 7, 2021, the Krasnoyarsk Regional Court upheld the verdict of the first instance. Andrey Stupnikov, a 47-year-old engineer from Krasnoyarsk, will have to spend 6 years in a colony for his faith in Jehovah. Although the verdict has entered into force, the believer has the right to appeal against it in cassation and in international instances.

[Continue reading...](#)

06.09.21 - The Court in Kostroma sentenced Dmitriy Terebilov to 3 years of a strict-regime colony for Bible discussions

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/09/061901.html>

On September 6, 2021, judge of the Sverdlovsk District Court of Kostroma, Yekaterina Molodova, found 41-year-old Dmitry Terebilov guilty of extremism for talking about the Bible and sentenced him to 3 years in a maximum security colony. Before becoming a believer, Dmitry was already in prison, but thanks to the Bible he changed so much that he was released early.

[Continue reading...](#)

04.09.21 - In Samara, church building being dismantled fell onto neighbouring house

Link to full text in Russian: <https://cutt.ly/jEuDR3G>

In the village of Mekhzavod in Samara, an emergency occurred. During the dismantling of an illegally built church building, a part of the wall collapsed onto a private house next door. The buildings stood quite near each other.

We recall that the "Good News" church, which is identified on Yandex maps as Catholic, belonged to a different confession. It was built by representatives of the "Pentecostals," which is one of the religious denominations within protestantism.

[Continue reading...](#)

03.09.21 - Appeals court reviews harsh sentences of Jehovah's Witnesses

Link to full text in Russian: <https://cutt.ly/IEuFw6m>

The Amur oblast court reviewed the appeals of the Jehovah's Witnesses Dmitry Golik and Aleksei Berchuk, who had been sentenced to 7 and 8 years in a prison colony respectively. OVD-Info was told this in the European Association of Jehovah's Witnesses.

The sentence of the 45-year-old Aleksei Berchuk—8 years in a penal colony of ordinary regime on a charge of arranging the activity of an extremist organization (part 1 of article 282.2 of the C.C.)—was left without changes.

[Continue reading...](#)

02.09.21 - Appeal in Khabarovsk upholds the verdict for faith to 42-year-old Nikolay Aliyev

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/09/021420.html>

On September 2, 2021, the Khabarovsk Regional Court upheld the sentence for faith handed down to Nikolay Aliyev — 4.5 years of probation. The verdict entered into force, but it can be appealed in cassation and international instances.

[Continue reading...](#)

Special bimonthly FORB digest (16-31.08.2021)

31.08.21 - After a complaint of Jehovah's Witnesses to the ECHR, two seriously ill residents of Kurgan were released from custody

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/08/310934.html>

On August 28, 2021, after a request from the European Court of Human Rights and human rights defenders, as well as a medical examination, the court released Alexander Lubin and Anatoly Isakov from the pre-trial detention center. For about 1.5 months, believers with disabilities were kept in conditions of torture that threaten their lives.

[Continue reading...](#)

30.08.21 - Republic of Tuva: consecration of an Orthodox church-yurt

Archbishop Feofan (Kim) of Korea presided over the ceremony. It is the second mobile tent of nomadic peoples used as a place of worship. Dedicated to the Blessed Matron of Moscow, a seer venerated throughout Russia. The Siberian region hosts a lager where 7 priests and 4 deacons serve.

[Continue reading...](#)

30.08.21 - More than 500 Orthodox churches to be built in Moscow

Moscow, August 30, Interfax - State Duma deputy Vladimir Resin who oversees the program for the construction of Orthodox churches in Moscow, known as the "program-200", reported a significant increase in its scale.

[Continue reading...](#)

28.08.21 - Moscow : 7 billion roubles to promote 'spiritual and moral content' online

The funds are in addition to another 3 billion already allocated by the government. The project's main target audience will be young people. An initiative supported by Patriarch Kirill (Gundjaev): "We urgently need to respond intervene to the youth crisis", especially after the protests in favour of Aleksej Naval'nyj.

[Continue reading...](#)

27.08.21 - Appeal in Vladivostok approved the sentence of four years of conditional imprisonment for a 73-year-old believer

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/08/251431.html>

On July 28, 2021 the panel of judges of the Primorsky Krai Court, chaired by Svetlana Gumenchuk, approved the verdict for Lyudmila Shut on appeal. The disabled person from the village of Razdolnoye was sentenced to 4 years of suspended imprisonment with

probation for 3 years and restriction of freedom for 1 year for reading and discussing the Bible.

[Continue reading...](#)

26.08.21 - A series of searches in Southwest Moscow. Three believers detained.

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/08/261323.html>

On August 25, 2021 law enforcers searched at least five apartments in the Tyoply Stan district of Moscow. Most of the victims were Jehovah's Witnesses. After interrogation, Eduard Sviridov, Sean Pike, and Aleksandr Rumyantsev were sent to jail. It is expected that on 27 August the Cheremushkinsky district court of Moscow will choose a measure of restraint for them.

[Continue reading...](#)

26.08.21 - The Court of Appeal in Perm upheld the verdict against 5 believers. conditional terms from 2.5 to 7 years were approved

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/08/241019.html>

On August 23, 2021, the Perm Regional Court rejected the appeal of five Jehovah's Witnesses. Boris Burylov, Viktor Kuchkov, Alexandr Inozemtsev and Yuriy Vaag were found guilty of participation, and Igor Turik was found guilty of organizing and financing extremist activities. The sentence imposed by the court of first instance has not changed.

[Continue reading...](#)

24.08.21 - Post-sentence: Curfews, regular registration, movement restrictions, job bans

Forum 18 (24.08.2021) - https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2681 - Jehovah's Witnesses and Muslims jailed on "extremism"-related charges for exercising freedom of religion or belief face years of restrictions once the sentence ends. With sudimost (the state of being a convicted person with an active criminal record), they risk harsher punishment if prosecuted again. Courts can impose post-sentence restrictions on freedom and administrative supervision, entailing curfews, movement restrictions, and regular registration with police or probation authorities. Individuals are barred from certain jobs.

[Continue reading...](#)

20.08.21 - Searches of Jehovah's Witnesses were again held in Sochi. 25-year-old believer is detained

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/08/201038.html>

In the early morning of August 18, searches were carried out in Sochi at three addresses at least as part of a criminal case against 25-year-old Danil Suvorov. The believer was detained and placed in a temporary detention facility. The next day, the court ruled to send him to a pre-trial detention center.

[Continue reading...](#)

19.08.21 - Another Jehovah's Witness convicted in Birobidzhan

Link to full text in Russian: <https://credo.press/238620/>

On 19 August, Judge Vasilina Bezotcheskikh of the Birobidzhan district court found the Jehovah's Witness Anastasia Guzeva guilty of participating in the activity of an extremist organization and sentenced her to a suspended prison term of 2.5 years, two years of probation, and one year of restricted liberty, a correspondent for the Credo.Press portal reported, citing a source among the Russian Jehovah's Witnesses.

[Continue reading...](#)

18.08.21 - Moscow patriarchate complains about alleged government negligence

Link to full text in Russian: <https://tass.ru/obschestvo/12161235>

Religious organizations were not able to receive a portion of measures of state support that was granted to other socially significant non-commercial organizations during the period of pandemic, the director of the legal department of the Moscow patriarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church, Hegumenia Ksenia, reported.

[Continue reading...](#)

More than ten criminal cases of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russian-occupied Crimea

Security forces arrest leader of yalta jehovists

By Alexander Dremligin

Stetson (17.08.2021) – <https://bit.ly/38eBxka> - The leader of the Yalta cell of the religious organization of Jehovah's Witnesses, who are banned in Russia, was arrested in Belgorod oblast while trying to cross the state border, Kommersant was told at the S.K.R. [Investigative Committee of Russia] for Crimea and Sevastopol. The name of the detainee has not been disclosed. The Kiev district court of Simferopol placed him in custody.

The man, who is on the federal wanted list, was arrested at the Nekhoteevka checkpoint. "In March of this year, he left the territory of the peninsula, fleeing from law enforcement agencies, and he was placed on the federal wanted list. The detainee is charged with arranging the activity of an extremist community (part 1, article 282.2 of CC RF)," the S.K.R. specified.

According to security officials, the Yalta cell of Jehovists has operated underground since July 2017 until March of this year, conducting propaganda meetings and distributing

funds for the needs of the congregation. The majority of members of this organization had been arrested previously and held criminally accountable. In all, law enforcement noted, there are five subjects in this criminal case. Another member of the cell is on the wanted list.

We recall, in March it was reported on the peninsula that another of the founders of the Yalta cell of the organization of Jehovah's Witnesses, which is forbidden in Russia, Taras Kuzko, was arrested on suspicion of financing extremist activity.

Since 2017, more than ten criminal cases against the banned organization of Jehovah's Witnesses have been opened in the region. Criminal prosecution of its adherents have been conducted in Yalta, Dzhankoy, Sevastopol, Kerch, and other cities of the peninsula. (tr. by PDS, posted 17 August 2021)

Photo: Wikimedia Commons

Russia moves to prohibit Ukrainian Orthodox church services in occupied Crimea

By Halya Coynash

Kharkiv Human Rights Protection Group (25.08.2021) - <https://bit.ly/3mDHS14> - A Russian-controlled 'court' in occupied Crimea [has fined](#) the Head of the St. Demetrius of Thessaloniki Men's Monastery for holding a church service on the private land on which the monastery stands. Russia, which is internationally condemned for its illegal occupation of Ukrainian Crimea, claimed that such worship constituted 'unlawful missionary activities'.

The 'ruling' on 23 August was passed by a 'magistrate' from the 'Bilohirsk District Court', with Archimandrite Damian fined 15 thousand roubles (around 200 euro) under Article 5.24 § 4 of Russia's code of administrative offences. The 'court' heard only the witnesses for the prosecution and did not give witnesses for the defence an opportunity to speak before passing a ruling which Archimandrite Damian is surely right in thinking had been prepared in advance. He points out that the prosecution witnesses, namely individuals from Russia's so-called 'centre for countering extremism' who burst into the church on 8 August, *"were not able to name a single fact of 'unlawful missionary activities' on my part. I didn't say a word to these 'wolves' who arrived in the church as we had already begun the liturgy."*

It seems that there were, in fact, two visitations by individuals from Russia's so-called 'Centre for countering extremism', however on the first occasion, they just stood and watched. Then, on 8 August, Major Volodymyr Viktorovych Gorievanov and his men [burst into the church](#) during the Sunday morning service and prevented Archimandrite Damian from continuing. The worshippers were forced to leave, and Gorievanov began drawing up the protocol about supposed illegal missionary activities. Archbishop Klyment, Head of the Church in Crimea, [called this](#) *"an appalling act of lawlessness. A priest is accused merely of praying to God in his own home. After all the territory of the monastery is private, with the building divided into two parts – the area where he lives, and that where he worships. Essentially a priest is to be tried for praying at home"*.

The occupation regime has already used the extraordinary claim about 'unlawful missionary activities' against Imams, prosecuting them too for holding prayers in their own mosque.

The situation here is slightly different. If the Russian occupiers (and the Muftiat which is collaborating with them) target specific mosques or religious communities that are viewed as 'too independent', the attack on the St. Demetrius of Thessaloniki Men's Monastery is part of a concentrated offensive against the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in Crimea which began essentially with Russia's invasion and annexation of the peninsula. One of many weapons used was the demand for 're-registration' under Russian legislation. Moscow doubtless hoped to hide its persecution of particular faiths by citing refusal to comply with the re-registration rule. That failed when, in early 2019, Archbishop Klyment announced that they were seeking such registration for the Crimean congregation (rather than for the Crimean Diocese of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church). The application [was, predictably enough, rejected](#).

After issuing the ready-made 'ruling' on 23 August, the 'judge' hid behind the security guards and vanished without providing an answer to Archimandrite Damian's most urgent question. He needs to know, he explained, whether he can still, after this 'ruling', carry out his priestly duties within the Crimean Diocese of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, or whether he must now leave Crimea if he wishes to remain a serving priest.

[The worrying answer to his question](#) was provided by Serhiy Zayets, the lawyer representing the Crimean Diocese. He stressed that the ruling would be appealed, however, if it is upheld, then yes, *"this will mean an indirect ban on services in the church of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in the village of Balki, Bilohirsk District. Or more exactly, [it will mean] that every attempt at such a service could cost 50 thousand roubles"* (the much steeper fine being for 'repeated offences').

In [an earlier interview](#) after the raid, Archbishop Klyment was fairly bitter about the Ukrainian government's abject failure to protect the Church in Crimea. It was only after he went on hunger strike in Kyiv that the Cabinet of Ministers [finally passed a resolution](#) aimed at defending the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in Ukraine. That was tabled in Ukraine's Verkhovna Rada [parliament], but has to this day not been placed on the agenda. This is shocking negligence. The Church in Ukraine is under attack to a large extent because of its importance as an element – and for many in occupied Crimea an oasis – of Ukrainian identity. For that reason alone, the government should be doing everything in its power to protect the Church. A sanctions list against those persecuting the Church was drawn up some time ago, but has also not been passed.

Just over a year ago, on 23 July 2020, Klyment [was threatened with criminal prosecution](#) if he did not demolish a Ukrainian Orthodox chapel in Yevpatoria. Then, on 4 August, Russia's Supreme Court [refused](#) to reconsider the decision to evict the Ukrainian Orthodox Diocese and congregation from the Cathedral of St Vladimir and Olga in Simferopol which Russia has been trying to take over since its invasion in 2014. Whether because of cases before international courts, including the European Court of Human Rights, or because Moscow fears that the Moscow Patriarchate has a lot to lose in mainland Ukraine, Russia has not implemented that decision. The aggression against the monastery demonstrates that this could happen at any time. In [reporting](#) the Supreme Court decision, Zayets wrote that it was time to sound the alarm, with the decision essentially meaning *"the total dissolution of the Ukrainian Orthodox community in Crimea. This is not formally genocide, but it borders on it. Russia is destroying yet another Ukrainian religious and cultural group and is continuing to purge Crimea of all that is Ukrainian"*.

Photo : Archimandrite Damian Photo posted on Censor.net

Prosecutor's Office deems four more religious groups as 'Undesirable'

Radio Free Europe – Radio Liberty (23.08.2021) - <https://bit.ly/3kmp03G> - Russia's Prosecutor-General's Office has deemed four evangelical groups from Latvia and Ukraine as "undesirable," saying they pose a threat to constitutional order and the country's security.

"Following the examination of materials filed in the Prosecutor-General's Office, a decision was made to deem undesirable the following nongovernmental organizations: the New Generation International Christian Movement (Latvia), the New Generation Evangelical Christian Church (Latvia), the New Generation Spiritual Directorate of the Evangelist Christians (Ukraine), and the New Generation International Biblical College spiritual educational facility (Ukraine)," the office [said in a statement](#) on August 23.

The ruling effectively bans the organizations, none of which immediately commented.

Dozens of foreign nongovernmental organizations have been deemed "undesirable" in Russia in recent months.

The "undesirable" organization law, adopted in May 2015 and since updated, was part of a series of regulations pushed by the Kremlin that squeezed many nonprofit and nongovernmental organizations that received funding from foreign sources – mainly from Europe and the United States.

In June, Russian President Vladimir Putin signed into law a bill that expands the scope of the "undesirable" law to include criminalizing participation in the activities of foreign nongovernmental organizations designated as such in Russia.

Photo : The Russian Prosecutor-General's Office announced the decision on August 23

Special bimonthly FORB digest (01-15.08.2021)

13.08.21 - Court in Krasnodar Territory sentenced 60-year-old Vasiliy Meleshko to 3 years in prison for talking about the Bible

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/08/131020.html>

The judge of the Abinsky District Court, Mikhail Ostashevskiy, considered the case of Vasiliy Meleshko in just two sessions and on August 11, 2021, sentenced him to 3 years

in a general regime colony, considering his peaceful religious activities to be extremist. The believer was arrested and handcuffed to the pre-trial detention center of Novorossiysk.

[Continue reading...](#)

12.08.21 - The Moscow Patriarchate's Constitution: How the Russian Orthodox church champions the Kremlin's battle against "falsification"

Russia's 2020 constitutional amendments provide fresh succor for the Kremlin's longstanding foreign policy priorities. These priorities include fortifying a muscular vision of sovereignty, non-interference, and a multipolar international order; disseminating "traditional values;" defending rights of compatriots living abroad; and cracking down on the so-called "falsification" of Russia's WWII history that tarnishes the country's reputation.

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11.08.21 - Sevastopol City Court upholds verdict on Jehovah's Witness sentenced to 6.5 years in penal colony

Link to full text in Russian: <https://credo.press/238548/>

A Sevastopol city court declined on 10 August to grant an appeal from the Jehovah's Witness Viktor Stashevsky against the verdict in his case. The panel of judges agreed that his religious activity is criminal; the believer will have to serve 6.5 years in a penal colony of medium security, a correspondent for the Credo.Press portal reports, citing sources among Russian adherents of Jehovah's Witnesses.

[Continue reading...](#)

11.08.21 - Sentence of Jehovah's witness Viktor Stashevsky left without changes

Link to full text in Russian: <https://cutt.ly/BQCzXs3>

A panel of a Sevastopol city court, including Judge Vasily Arkhimov, left in force the verdict of the court of first instance in the case of Viktor Stashevsky, who was sentenced to six and a half years for arranging the activity of a religious association of Jehovah's Witnesses, who are forbidden in the Russian Federation. This was reported by a Krymskii Protsess correspondent from the Sevastopol city courthouse.

[Continue reading...](#)

11.08.21 - Russia prosecutes head of a Ukrainian Orthodox Monastery in occupied Crimea for 'unlawful missionary activities'

Masked law enforcement officers carried out mass raids on the Jehovah's Witnesses across Russia on Tuesday and made a number of arrests as part of a new criminal case against the group, the Investigative Committee said.

The law enforcement agency said it had opened an investigation as it suspected the Christian denomination was organising the activity in Moscow of its national centre and affiliates.

[Continue reading...](#)

10.08.21 - New arrests of Jehovah's Witnesses, and record sentence upheld in Russian-occupied Crimea

A Russian-controlled 'court' in occupied Crimea has upheld the appalling 6.5-year sentence passed on Viktor Stashevsky. The news comes a week after the FSB in occupied Yalta launched new criminal proceedings against two Jehovah's Witnesses, including **Darya Kuzio**, whose husband, **Taras Kuzio** was arrested in March this year. The three, and many other believers, face imprisonment, essentially for praying and sharing their faith with others.

[Continue reading...](#)

09.08.21 - Ukraine ombudsperson calls out Russia's violations of religious rights in occupied Crimea

Verkhovna Rada Commissioner for Human Rights Liudmyla Denisova has called on the international community to increase diplomatic and sanctions pressure on the Russian Federation and to condemn actions violating the rights of the faithful with the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU) in the temporarily occupied Crimea.

[Continue reading...](#)

09.08.21 - "After a heart attack, I was put into a cage in handcuffs." The story of the persecution for faith of Olga Opaleva and her son in Primorye

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/08/091601.html>

Olga Opaleva, a 69-year-old pensioner from Primorye, has been prosecuted for her faith in Jehovah for the third year. The security forces searched and detained the believer, knowing that she had a heart attack the night before. A few months later, on the way to the hearing, Olga suffered a stroke. In another city, Olga's son, [Vitaliy Ilinykh](#), is on trial for his convictions.

[Continue reading...](#)

05.08.21 - The Appeal in Yoshkar-Ola upheld the suspended sentence of 31-year-old Yekaterina Pegasheva

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/08/050821.html>

On August 4, 2021, the Supreme Court of the Republic of Mari El rejected Ekaterina Pegasheva's appeal against [the verdict](#). The believer was sentenced to 6.5 years probation with a probation period of 4 years for talking on spiritual topics, which the court considered "organizing the activities of a banned organization."

[Continue reading...](#)

05.08.21 - Rural churches rescued from common fate of soviet era

Link to full text in Russian: <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=77638>

The prosecutor's office of Spassky district of Tatarstan confirmed, on the basis of results of an inspection, reports to the effect that in two villages of the republic, architectural monuments had been converted into grain storehouses and cattle sheds, and submissions have been made on this matter, a senior assistant prosecutor for relations with news media of the district, Ruslan Galiev, reported.

[Continue reading...](#)

02.08.21 - Jehovah's Witnesses' sentences pile up in south of Russia

Link to full text in Russian: <https://www.kavkaz-uzel.media/articles/366639/>

A court in Rostov-on-Don found Andrei Okhrimchuk guilty of participating in activity of a local religious organization of Jehovah's Witnesses and also of financing it. The believer intends to appeal the verdict.

As Kavkazskii Uzel has written, the independent businessman, resident of Rostov-on-Don Andrei Okhrimchuk was questioned in court in the case of the Jehovah's Witness Galina Parkova on 25 November 2020. During questioning, Okhrimchuk indicated that he also is a Jehovah's Witness and a criminal case on a similar article was opened against him.

[Continue reading...](#)

02.08.21 - Security service in Blagoveshchensk relentless in pursuit of Jehovah's Witnesses

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

The directorate of the F.S.B. for Amur oblast arraigned Kristina Golik and Maria Portniagina as defendants in a criminal case about belonging to an extremist organization (part 2, article 282.2 of Criminal Code). Both women are pledged not to leave their place of residence. This was reported on 27 July by a portal devoted to the persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia.

[Continue reading...](#)

03.08.21 - The court in Rostov-on-Don sentenced Andrey Okhrimchuk to 4 years probation for faith in Jehovah God

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/08/030820.html>

On August 2, 2021, Olga Borokhova, judge of the Leninsky District Court of Rostov-on-Don, found 42-year-old Andrei Okhrimchuk guilty of extremism and sentenced him to 4 years of probation, as well as 1 year of restraint of freedom - the prosecutor asked for such a punishment.

[Continue reading...](#)

Vasiliy Meleshko is the 22nd Jehovah's Witness sentenced to prison in 2021

By Willy Fautré, Human Rights Without Frontiers

The European Times (14.08.2021) - <https://bit.ly/3xM62s3> - On 11 August, 60-year-old Vasiliy Meleshko was sentenced to three years in prison after only one day of hearings at the Abinskiy District Court of Krasnodar Territory. Vasiliy was handcuffed in the courtroom and taken to pretrial detention center No. 3 for Krasnodar Territory.

Vasiliy is among [16 Jehovah's Witnesses charged in Krasnodar](#), including 6 in prison or pretrial detention (5 male; 1 female).

Convicted, Sentenced to Prison in 2021

10.02.2021: Aleksandr Ivshin, 7.5 years
24.02.2021: Roman Baranovskiy, 6 years
24.02.2021: Valentina Baranovskaya, 2 years
29.03.2021: Viktor Stashevskiy, 6.5 years
30.03.2021: Oleg Danilov, 3 years
06.04.2021: Aleksandr Shcherbina, 3 years
20.05.2021: Rustam Seidkuliev, 2.5 years
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
03.06.2021: Andrei Stupnikov, 6 years
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)
29.07.2021: Alexander Parkov and Arsen Avanesov (6.5 years) and Vilen Avanesov (6 years)
11.08.2021: Vasiliy Meleshko, 3 years

Reactions to Meleshko Verdict

Sir Andrew Wood, former U.K. ambassador to Russia (1995-2000), says: "Sentencing a man after one day's hearing for discussing established religious teaching and issues to three years in prison amounts to extremism in itself. The Abinskiy District Court must obviously have decided on its verdict in advance." [contact: andrewood40@gmail.com]

Rachel Denber, deputy director of Human Rights Watch's Europe and Central Asia division, says: "It's astounding that a court anywhere would send a person to prison for doing nothing more than peacefully practicing their religion. The sentence against Meleshko, and those against all Jehovah's Witnesses similarly convicted for extremism in recent years should be vacated, and they should all be freed without delay." [contact: denberr@hrw.org]

Amnesty International, Eastern Europe and Central Asia, states: "Amnesty International is aware of numerous cases of unlawful criminal prosecution and jailing of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia and is utterly concerned by the ever-spreading campaign of repressions against them. We reiterate our call on Russian authorities to put an end to this shameful campaign and release all Jehovah's Witnesses deprived of their liberty solely for exercising their rights to freedom of expression and association." [contact: russioteam@amnesty.org]

Jarrold Lopes, spokesman for Jehovah's Witnesses, says: "It is a mockery of the rule of law to hold a one-day trial and imprison a peaceful older man simply for his Christian beliefs. Rights experts and [international bodies](#) continue to implore Russia to halt the persecution. Jehovah's Witnesses want nothing more than to freely worship in their home country as their fellow believers do in over 200 other lands."

Meleshko Case History

- April 7, 2021, three armed officers raid home of Vasiliy and his wife, Zoya. Officers confiscate a laptop, mobile phones, Bibles, and the couple's personal savings, claiming these were donations to support extremist activity. Also confiscated was an unsent letter to Alexander Ivshin also from Krasnodar, who was convicted and sentenced to 7.5 years in prison in February 2021
- April 12, Vasiliy officially charged under Art. 282.2 (2) for participating in "religious teaching classes, sermons" and because he "gave and listened to lectures based on religious literature ... entered into conversations and religious discussions with other participants, participated in a collective discussion of religious books
- August 10, criminal trial begins and goes through all stages. Judge Mikhail Ostashevsk announced verdict the following day

[Link](#) to images of Meleshko. Please use credit line: Courtesy of Jehovah's Witnesses.

Detailed timeline [here](#).

Nationwide Persecution against Jehovah's Witnesses (Russia and Crimea)

- **257** criminal cases, involving **531** believers
- **51** in prison
- **33** under house arrest
- **1,523** homes of Witnesses raided since the 2017 Supreme Court ruling that liquidated the Witnesses' legal entities

The life of two Jehovah's Witnesses under threat in prison

An emergency application was filed yesterday, 9 August, with the European court to save the life of Anatoliy Isakov and Aleksandr Lubin, categorized as "degree II disabled persons" and currently in custody

HRWF with JW.ORG (11.08.2021) – On 9 August, an application was filed with the European Court of Human Rights to save the lives of two elderly Jehovah's Witnesses in custody since mid-July who suffer from very serious diseases.

The Court may, under Rule 39 of its Rules of Court, indicate interim measures to any State party to the Convention. Interim measures are urgent measures which, in accordance with the established practice of the Court, apply only where there is an imminent risk of irreparable damage. This is the case with Mr. Isakov (born in 1964) and Mr Lubin (born in 1956).

The background

On July 13 and 14 2021, a total of 13 raids took place in the cities of Kurgan and Shadrinsk, Kurgan Region. The raids occurred within the framework of criminal cases under Article 282.2 (1) and (2) of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation (organizing the activity of an extremist organization and participating in it) against several Jehovah's Witnesses. After the raids, at least five of them were detained. The Kurgan City Court ruled to place Aleksandr Lubin and Anatoliy Isakov in pre-trial detention for two months.

The Russian Supreme Court banned the activities of Jehovah's Witnesses in April 2017, leading to a campaign of terror against the Witnesses. Since early 2018, authorities throughout Russia have been arresting and imprisoning Witnesses for practicing their faith – whether meeting together for worship, reading the Bible, or talking to others about their faith.

The case of Mr Isakov

Mr. Isakov is categorized as "degree II disabled person" and **suffers from very serious diseases**, including multiple myeloma (malignant tumor) and multiple compression fractures of the thoracic and lumbar vertebrae, as well as five rib fractures, among other illnesses.

Despite these conditions, the court took Mr. Isakov into custody based on a doctor's certificate which stated that he did not have any diseases that could prevent him from being held in custody. While in the custody, he is expected to perform various types of physical labor and will likely be deprived of his medications. **All this creates a high risk to his health and life and is comparable to torture.**

On July 19, 2021, Mr. Isakov's lawyer filed a complaint against the erroneous medical conclusion, an appeal against the court's ruling to place him in detention, and an application with the head of the pre-trial detention center requesting to ensure his right to proper medical treatment. The lawyer attached **17 certificates from various medical institutions proving his serious health condition**. As a result, on July 23, 2021, Mr. Isakov was transferred to the Medical Correctional Facility of the Department of the Federal Penitentiary Service for the Kurgan Region. However, he is officially still in custody and can return to his cell.

His lawyer also submitted another motion to the Kurgan City Court requesting immediate release from the pre-trial detention facility. The motion requested an expedited medical examination with the intent to determine if he is suffering from diseases included in the list approved by the decree of the Russian government #3 from 14.01.2011. Unfortunately, the judge of the Kurgan City Court refused to consider this motion and, as a result, there is no ruling which can be appealed.

On July 28, 2021, the Kurgan Regional Court was scheduled to consider the appeal against the lower court's decision to place him in custody, which had been filed on July 19, 2021. The case was not considered, because the medical-correctional institution did not allow his participation in the trial; he had been placed in quarantine because of his high temperature and the suspicion of having contracted COVID-19. Official analysis later showed a darkening of his lungs.

The court session was first postponed to August 4, 2021, and then later to August 6, 2021. At this hearing, the appellate court canceled the ruling of the court of first instance and made exactly the same ruling; to remain in custody. Isakov's attorney attached to the case file a medical examination which makes the conclusion that he should not be in a detention center because of suffering from serious illnesses. Isakov attended this court hearing via video conference and was observed to be in very poor physical condition.

The case of Mr. Lubin

Mr Lubin is categorized as “degree II disabled person” and **suffers from very serious diseases**, including hypertonia, Raynaud's syndrome, and progressive systemic sclerosis with damage to various organs. In addition to his medications, he must take humidified oxygen for 16 hours each day. In 2020 alone, he was hospitalized for treatment three times. It is difficult for him even to walk, and when he falls down, he needs the help of others to get up. He suffers constant pain in various parts of his body.

Despite these conditions, the court took Mr. Lubin into custody based on a doctor's certificate which stated that he did not have any diseases that could prevent him from being held in custody. While in the custody, he is expected to perform various types of physical labor and will likely be deprived of his medications. **All this creates a high risk to his health and life and is comparable to torture.**

On July 20, Mr. Lubin's lawyer filed a complaint against the erroneous medical conclusion, an appeal against the court's ruling to place him in detention, and an application with the head of the pre-trial detention center requesting to ensure his right to proper medical treatment. The lawyer attached **20 certificates from various medical institutions proving his serious health condition**. As a result, on July 23, 2021, Mr. Lubin was transferred to the Medical Correctional Facility of the Department of the Federal Penitentiary Service for the Kurgan Region. However, he is officially still in custody and can return to his cell.

On 28 July 2021, the attorney filed a separate motion to the Kurgan City Court requesting immediate release of Mr. Lubin from the pre-trial detention center but it was ignored by the City Court. The motion requested an expedited medical examination with the intent to determine if he is suffering from diseases included in the list approved by the decree of the Russian government #3 from 14.01.2011.

Alexander Parkov and Arsen Avanesov and Vilen Avanesov are Jehovah's Witnesses Nr 19, 20, 21 sentenced to prison in 2021

Russia sentences three Jehovah's Witnesses to six years in prison



Russia declared the Christian denomination extremist in 2017. Alexander Artemenkov / TASS

HRWF with Moscow Times and JW.ORG (30.07.2021) - A Russian district court in the southern city of Rostov-on-Don sentenced three Jehovah's Witnesses to six years in prison on extremism charges on Thursday, the religious organization told The Moscow Times in an emailed statement.

Alexander Parkov and Arsen Avanesov were sentenced to six and a half years, and **Vilen Avanesov** to six years in prison. All three had pleaded "not guilty."

In 2017, the Russian Supreme Court declared the Christian denomination extremist and banned all of its activities. Since the designation, 51 followers are currently in prison, 33 have been sentenced to a prison term and 34 remain under house arrest, according to the Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia [website](#).

Spokesman for the European Association of Jehovah's Witnesses Yaroslav Sivulsky called the extremism sentences "groundless."

"Since the Supreme Court did not prohibit professing the faith of Jehovah's Witnesses individually or in community with others, the ban applies exclusively to legal entities, but not to the faith itself," he said in the statement.

Extremist activity includes "propaganda of the exclusivity, superiority or inferiority of a person on the basis of his social, racial, national, religious or linguistic affiliation or attitude to religion" according to the language in the 2017 ruling.

The persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses by the Russian authorities is groundless, since the Supreme Court did not prohibit professing the faith of Jehovah's Witnesses individually or in community with others. The ban applies exclusively to legal entities, but not to the faith itself.

Rachel Denber, deputy director of Human Rights Watch's Europe and Central Asia division, says: "These men should never, ever have had to spend a minute in prison, and yet they've been locked up for two years. It is never too late for Russian authorities to stop these arrests, release Jehovah's witnesses who are behind bars, stop

these criminal proceedings, and quash the convictions that have already taken place.”
[denberr@hrw.org]

Some reactions

Sir Andrew Wood, former U.K. ambassador to Russia (1995-2000), says: “Two years plus in pretrial detention before a verdict on Extremism for three Jehovah’s Witnesses is already an injustice. ‘Extremism’ in Russia is an indictment delivered by diktat labelling a number of organisations, including Jehovah’s Witnesses. It has no credible definition. It carries harsh penalties. Persons who remain true to their convictions are especially exposed to its cruelty. Its purpose is repression, not the exercise of justice.” [contact: andrewood40@gmail.com]

Tatyana Moskalkova, Ombudsman for Human Rights in the Russian Federation, referring to the growing number of criminal cases against believers, said in her report to the President of Russia: “These events make one think about the existence of a conflict between the constitutional right to profess one’s religion individually or jointly with others and signs of extremist activity, specified in article 282.2 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation. [...] Vague criteria for classifying religious materials as extremist are unacceptable, when virtually any federal judge at his own discretion can prohibit any book, image, video or audio recording.”

Nationwide Persecution (Russia and Crimea)

- **246** criminal cases, involving **517** believers
- **51** in prison
- **34** under house arrest
- **1,507** homes of Witnesses raided since the 2017 Supreme Court ruling that liquidated the Witnesses’ legal entities
- Moscow-based [Memorial Human Rights Center](#) recognizes Jehovah’s Witnesses, who have been charged with or convicted of extremism for their faith, as political prisoners

Special bimonthly FORB digest (16-31.07.2021)

29.07.21 - Rostov court treats Jehovah's Witnesses harshly

Full text only in Russian: <https://www.kavkaz-uzel.media/articles/366509/>

A court in Rostov-on-Don sentenced to real prison terms in a penal colony of general regime the Jehovah's Witnesses Alexander Parkov, and Vilen and Arsen Avanesov, having found them guilty in a case regarding an extremist organization.

Continue reading...

29.07.21 - A wave of searches in 4 cities of the Murmansk Region. Roman Markin convicted of faith is among its victims

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/07/291740.html>

On July 21 and 22, 2021, about 10 searches were carried out in four cities of the Murmansk region. The security forces broke into the homes of local Jehovah's Witnesses mostly at night, interrogated them for many hours, and confiscated personal belongings. Criminal cases have been initiated against four believers.

[Continue reading...](#)

28.07.21 - New search and criminal case for faith in Luchegorsk. 62-year-old Yuriy Ponomarenko was placed on recognizance not to leave.

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/07/280833.html>

On July 22, 2021, a 62-year-old electrician Yuriy Ponomarenko was searched in Luchegorsk (Primorsky Territory). Later, the believer was interrogated and placed on recognizance not to leave. A criminal case was initiated against him under an extremist article.

[Continue reading...](#)

23.07.21 - The appeal in Novosibirsk upheld the verdict against Vitaliy Popov for faith

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/07/231447.html>

On July 23, 2021, the Novosibirsk Regional Court upheld the verdict of the first instance court. Vitaliy Popov, 54, was found guilty of participation in the activities of an extremist organization and its financing.

[Continue reading...](#)

22.07.21 - Moscow patriarch addresses Orthodox political assembly

Link to full text in Russian: <https://religionpravda.com.ua/?p=72022>

Patriarch of Moscow Kirill urged "strengthening solidarity in support of suffering brethren in the Near East, in Northern Africa, in Kosovo and Metohija, in Ukraine, and also wherever Christians are being subjected to persecution." He talked about this in his appeal to participants in the Inter-Parliamentary Assembly of Orthodoxy on Crete.

[Continue reading...](#)

21.07.21 - In the town of Kodinsk, Krasnoyarsk Territory, one of Jehovah's Witnesses was detained after a search

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/07/211416.html>

Early on the morning of July 20, 2021 law enforcement officers conducted searches in Kodinsk, Krasnoyarsk Territory, at least five locations where Jehovah's Witnesses reside. According to preliminary data, one person was detained. Electronic devices were confiscated from peaceful believers.

[Continue reading...](#)

21.07.21 - Heavy fines imposed on Jehovah's Witnesses in Kirov

Link to full text in Russian:

https://vkirove.ru/news/2021/07/21/3_svidetelya_iegovy_prigovoreny_v_kirovskoy_oblasti_k_shtrafam.html

The regional Investigative Committee of Russia (S.K.R.) has reported the completion of the judicial investigation and the imposing of a sentence in a criminal case, which was investigated by the first department for investigation of especially serious cases of the investigation department of the Investigative Committee of Russia for Kirov oblast on charges regarding three residents of Kirov oblast.

[Continue reading...](#)

20.07.21 - In Birobidzhan the Court gave Anna Lokhvitskaya a 2.5 year suspended sentence for her belief in Jehovah. Such a sentence had already been imposed on her husband and mother-in-law

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/07/201520.html>

On July 20, 2021, Judge Vasilina Bezotecheskikh of the Birobidzhan District Court of the EAD sentenced Anna Lokhvitskaya to 2.5 years' probation for participating in the activities of a banned organization. The verdict can be appealed. The believer insists that she wasn't involved in any extremism.

[Continue reading...](#)

20.07.21 - The Court of Appeal left unchanged the verdict against four believers from the City of Chekhov

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/07/201729.html>

On 20 July 2021, the Moscow regional court did not satisfy the appeal against the criminal case against Vitaliy Nikiforov, Konstantin Zherebtsov, Yuriy and Zinaida Krutyakov from the town of Chekhov. The court equated their peaceful discussion of the Bible with friends with extremism.

[Continue reading...](#)

19.07.21 - Seven Jehovah's Witnesses in Griazi are defendants

Link to full text in Russian: <https://moskvichi.net/dvoe-svidetelej-iegovy-dostavleny-pod-domashnij-arest-posle-240-dnej-v-sizo-moskvichi-net-proisshestvija/>

On 15 July, a Griazi city court of Lipetsk oblast transferred to house arrest the Jehovah's Witnesses Sergei Kretov and Evgeny Reshetnikov, who had been in pre-trial detention for 241 days. This was reported by the Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia website.

[Continue reading...](#)

17.07.21 - Orthodox believers defy government to honor royal saints

Link to full text in Russian: <https://credo.press/238211/>

Several thousand pilgrims made their way in the night of 17 July for a procession of the cross in memory of the death of the Holy Tsar Nicholas II, scheduled for the 103rd anniversary of the shooting of the royal family. The procession, which was forbidden by the authorities because of the coronavirus pandemic, began after the liturgy conducted by hierarchs of the RPTsMP in the Church-on-the-Blood

[Continue reading...](#)

15.07.21 - The re-examination of the criminal case for faith in Karpinsk is over. Defendants received suspended sentences from 1 to 2.5 Years

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/07/161427.html>

On July 15, 2021, the judge of the Karpinsk City Court of the Sverdlovsk Region Vera Bazuyeva found Aleksandr Prianikov, as well as Venera and Darya Dulova guilty of participating in the activities of a banned organization. Their case was re-tried in the same court after the previous verdict was overturned.

[Continue reading...](#)

Special bimonthly FORB digest (01-15.07.2021)

13.07.21 - Fifth Jehovah's Witness convicted in Rostov-on-Don

Full text only in Russian: <https://www.kavkaz-uzel.media/articles/365960/>

A court in Rostov-on-Don found that Jehovah's Witness Olga Ganusha is a member of an extremist organization and sentenced her to a two-year suspended prison term. The believer declared that she intends to appeal the sentence.

[Continue reading...](#)

13.07.21 - Fifth Jehovah's Witness convicted in Rostov-on-Don

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[Continue reading...](#)

12.07.21 - Road to ban Falun Gong in Russia Continues, U.S. react

On July 8, the Court of Kemerovo ruled against the movement in what may become a crucial case.

[Continue reading...](#)

12.07.21 - New prisoners of conscience in the Vladimir region of Russia: Two more Jehovah's Witnesses sent to detention centers

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/07/121739.html>

On July 8, 2021, new criminal cases were filed against Jehovah's Witnesses living in the Vladimir region. Aleksey Kupriyanov, 48, from Kovrov, and Roman Adestov, 45, from the village of Ivanovo were interrogated and detained. The next day, the Oktyabrskiy district court of Vladimir put them in custody.

[Continue reading...](#)

10.07.21 - Direct clash between metropolitan and governor in Ekaterinburg over tsarist pilgrimage

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

On 8 July, Sverdlovsk oblast Governor Evgeny Kuivashev (a member of the Supreme Council of United Russia, typical representative of the Sobianin clan, loyal associate and even, it is said, a relative of the Moscow mayor) forbade the traditional Tsarist Procession, which will be conducted in Ekaterinburg on the anniversary of the murder of Emperor Nicholas II and his family.

[Continue reading...](#)

08.07.21 - Searches of Jehovah's Witnesses took place in the Tver Region. Criminal case is initiated against two believers

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/07/081619.html>

On July 6, 2021, it became known about a new criminal case for faith initiated in the city of Konakovo (Tver region) against 61-year-old Alexandr Starikov and 34-year-old Sergey Naumenko. At least 4 searches were carried out, one of them 260 kilometers from Konakovo, in Ivanovo.

[Continue reading...](#)

06.07.21 - What happened in Abakan? Details around the sentence that sent a 70-year-old woman and her son to prison for believing in Jehovah

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/07/061554.html>

On February 24, 2021, the Abakan City Court convicted 70-year-old Valentina Baranovskaya and her son, Roman. Both are Jehovah's Witnesses. Following the verdict, they were immediately taken into custody from the courtroom. Sadly, three months later the appeal court upheld the unjust verdict. They were cruelly and inhumanely sentenced to two and six years in prison, respectively.

[Continue reading...](#)

06.07.21 - Aleksey Budenchuk released from prison. He is the third resident of Saratov to serve a sentence for believing in God Jehovah

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/07/061401.html>

On July 6, 2021, one of Jehovah's Witnesses, convicted for his beliefs, Aleksey Budenchuk, having served his full sentence, left penal colony No. 1 in the city of Orenburg. His family and friends traveled 800 kilometers to meet beloved husband, father and friend.

[Continue reading...](#)

05.07.21 - Putin increases attention to state manipulation of religion

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

On 2 July 2021, Russian President Vladimir Putin signed an ukase approving a new National Security Strategy. It replaces the previous document of the same type, which was adopted in late 2015.

[Continue reading...](#)

01.07.21 - 75-year-old Vladimir Suvorov from Chelyabinsk was sentenced to 6-year suspended sentence for faith in Jehovah

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/07/011417.html>

On July 1, 2021, Oksana Mitina, a judge of the Metallurgical District Court of Chelyabinsk, found an elderly believer guilty of organizing the activities of a banned organization. She sentenced Vladimir Suvorov to 6 years of conditional imprisonment.

[Continue reading...](#)

Road to ban Falun Gong continues, U.S. react

On July 8, the Court of Kemerovo ruled against the movement in what may become a crucial case.

by Massimo Introvigne



Russian anti-cultists Roman Silantyev (left) and Alexander Dvorkin.

Bitter Winter (12.07.2021) - <https://bit.ly/3AZkDmR> - *Bitter Winter* has reported in the past about the maneuvers of Russian anti-cultists such as Alexander Dvorkin and Roman Silantyev to have Falun Gong banned in Russia as an “extremist” organization. Falun Gong has been active in Russia for many years without causing any problems, and the only reason it is labeled as “extremist” is the close cooperation between Russian anti-cultists and their Chinese counterparts.

On November 10, 2020, the Fifth General Court of Appeal of Novosibirsk designated Falun Gong as an “extremist organization,” and “liquidated” its branch in the Siberian region of Khakassia. The judges also recommended a nation-wide “liquidation” of Falun Gong in Russia, which they were however not competent to pronounce.

This decision was rendered on an appeal filed by the public federal prosecutor against a decision by the Supreme Court of Khakassia, which on July 29, 2020, had concluded that Falun Gong is not “extremist” and should not be liquidated in Khakassia.

Falun Gong appealed the decision of November 10, 2020 before the Justice Court of Kemerovo. On July 8, 2021, the Court of Kemerovo rejected the appeal and confirmed the decision of Novosibirsk.

On July 9, the U.S. Department of State condemned “the designation of the Khakassia regional branch of Falun Gong as ‘extremist’” in a decision where judges “criminalize the peaceful practice of their spiritual beliefs. Russian authorities harass, fine, and imprison Falun Gong practitioners for such simple acts as meditating and possessing spiritual texts.”

The U.S. Department of State noted that this is just another example of the Russian “practice of misusing the ‘extremist’ designation as a way to restrict human rights and fundamental freedoms.” “We continue to call on Russia, the Department of State said, to

respect the right of freedom of religion or belief for all, including Falun Gong practitioners and members of other religious minority groups in Russia simply seeking to exercise their beliefs peacefully.”

The Department of State commented that the decision against Falun Gong “is another example of Russian authorities labeling peaceful groups as ‘extremist,’ ‘terrorist,’ or ‘undesirable’ solely to stigmatize their supporters, justify abuses against them, and restrict their peaceful religious and civic activities. The Russian government has done so against a number of groups, whose members face home raids, extended detention, excessive prison sentences, and harassment for their peaceful religious practices.”

Special bimonthly FORB digest (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 Metalurgical 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 Kholmanskaya 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 Jehovahists 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 digest (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 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

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, Apsheronkiy 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 Zhinzhirov (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 Zhinzhirov); 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 digest (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 Vrady.

[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.

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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.

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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.

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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.

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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).

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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.

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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.

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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.

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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).

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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 Sibiryova 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 Sibiriyova 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 veroisповedanii] 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 digest (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 digest (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/pbQEpem>

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 Courtⁱ.

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 Roublesⁱⁱ.

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 studiesⁱⁱⁱ.

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.

¹ 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 (accessed 31 May 2018).

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

¹ 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

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 FORB digest (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 Kholmskaya (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 FORB digest (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 FORB digest (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/

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/

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/

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 Lohvitsky, 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 Nevinnomysk (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 Igoevna 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 Sergeyevna 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 Alyev – 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.

Jarrold 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 digest (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.

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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.

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12.02.21 - The verdict has been announced for the 66th Jehovah's Witness. In Birobizhdan, 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.

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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.

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10.02.21 - An unprecedentedly harsh sentence for a 63-year-old witness from the village of Kholmetskaya: 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.

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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 Ovsyannikov, 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 digest (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.

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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 Makhmadiyev 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 Makhmadiyev, 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.)

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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 digest (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 Kholmskaya 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 Bardymy 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/3nmYa15> – 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.

ⁱ 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 (accessed 31 May 2018).

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

ⁱⁱⁱ 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).