

Table of Contents

- [**3 trials in 3 weeks: 11 Jehovah's Witnesses sentenced in all to 67 years and 7 months**](#)
- [**No legal provision for alternative civilian service during mobilisation**](#)
- [**Conscientious objection and the war in Ukraine, a major court decision**](#)
- [**Religious conscientious objectors and the war in Ukraine**](#)
- [**Religious freedom and issues – Bimonthly Digest \(01–15.12.2022\)**](#)
- [**Three Jehovah's Witnesses: Guilty, guilty, then acquitted but maybe guilty again**](#)
- [**Profondes inquiétudes concernant l'infiltration de la branche russe de la FECRIS en Belgique**](#)
- [**Deep concerns about the infiltration of FECRIS' Russian branch in Belgium**](#)
- [**Religious freedom and issues – Bimonthly Digest \(15–30.11.2022\)**](#)
- [**Orthodox archpriest Novopashin, a voice of FECRIS in Russia and anti-Ukrainian hate speech**](#)
- [**Religious freedom and issues – Bimonthly Digest \(01–15.11.2022\)**](#)
- [**Silantyev, Amelina: Ukrainian "cults" have killed 500 children in Russia**](#)
- [**Seven Jehovah's Witnesses sentenced to six years in prison in October**](#)
- [**Special Bimonthly FORB Digest \(16–31.10.2022\)**](#)
- [**РОССИЙСКИЙ УГОЛОК ФЕЙКОВЫХ НОВОСТЕЙ: «Свидетели Иеговы готовят антипутинский переворот», - говорит российский адвокат Александр Корелов**](#)
- [**RUSSIAN FAKE NEWS CORNER: Jehovah's Witnesses prepare an anti-Putin coup, says Russian lawyer Alexander Korelov**](#)
- [**Special Bimonthly FORB Digest \(01–15.10.2022\)**](#)
- [**Special Bimonthly FORB Digest \(16–30.09.2022\)**](#)
- [**33 Jehovah's Witnesses sentenced to prison terms since 1 January 2022**](#)
- [**Special Bimonthly FORB Digest \(01–15.09.2022\)**](#)
- [**Criminal trial against six Muslims following Turkish theologian Said Nursi**](#)
- [**Уголовный процесс против шести мусульман по делу турецкого богослова Саида Нурси**](#)
- [**Final sentences to prison terms for 26 Jehovah's Witnesses since 1 January 2022**](#)
- [**Special Bimonthly FORB Digest \(16–31.08.2022\)**](#)
- [**Putin has a new great data base of religious \(and non-religious\) "extremists"**](#)
- [**Government pressure on religious leaders to support Ukraine war**](#)
- [**Gap widening between the Moscow Patriarchate and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church**](#)
- [**Ukraine war: Thousands of Jews quit Russia amid fears of persecution**](#)
- [**Special Bimonthly FORB Digest \(01–15.08.2022\)**](#)
- [**Protestant churches targeted by repression**](#)
- [**Special Bimonthly FORB Digest \(15–31.07.2022\)**](#)

- Head of Russian Orthodox Church banned from entering Lithuania
- Special Bimonthly FORB Digest (01–15.07.2022)
- Final sentences to prison terms for 20 Jehovah’s Witnesses since 1 January 2022
- Oral statement at the UN for prosecution of Patriarch Kirill
- Russian leading anti-cultist calls Ukrainians “nazis,” “satanists,” and “cannibals”
- Special Bimonthly FORB Digest (16–30.06.2022)
- Special Bimonthly FORB Digest (01–15.06.2022)
- FECRIS should lose its Consultative Status with the United Nations ECOSOC
- A pacifist Orthodox priest defrocked, arrested and facing 10 years in prison
- FECRIS, Russia, Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and the War on Ukraine
- Strasbourg rules Russia’s ban on Jehovah’s Witnesses in 2017 is unlawful
- Recent cases of persecution of Muslims
- Special Bimonthly FORB Digest (16–31.05.2022)
- 15 Jehovah’s Witnesses sentenced to prison terms since 1 January
- A Danish Jehovah’s Witness released after five years in prison
- Special Bimonthly FORB Digest (01–15.05.2022)
- Special Bimonthly FORB Digest (16–30.04.2022)
- Moscow Patriarchate should be sanctioned for blessing the war
- Правозащитники требуют предъявить уголовное обвинение патриарху Кириллу
- The Russian FECRIS’ support for the invasion of Ukraine
- Seven Jehovah’s Witnesses put on trial in Russian-occupied Crimea for studying the Bible
- Human rights activists call for indictment of Russian Patriarch Kirill
- Patriarch Kiril should be prosecuted by the International Criminal Court (ICC), according to a NGO report
- 5th anniversary of the ban of Jehovah’s Witnesses: Statistics about the repression
- Special Bimonthly FORB Digest (01–15.04.2022)
- Hundreds of priests of the Moscow Patriarchate in Ukraine condemn the role of Russian Patriarch Kirill in the war
- The European Parliament has condemned the role of Russian Patriarch Kirill in the war
- Freedom of religion or belief – Special bimonthly FORB (16.03-01.04-2022)
- Muslim followers of peaceful new religious movements prosecuted
- How the Russian Orthodox Church enabled Putin’s war against Ukraine
- Impassioned appeal from Ukrainian Muslim leader in face of Russia’s war to destroy Ukraine
- Russia sentences two Crimean Tatars to 17 and 13 years for talking about their faith
- Patriarch who’s in lockstep with Putin

- [*Putin recruits Muslims in his war in Ukraine*](#)
- [*Freemasonry in Russia and the war in Ukraine: “Be faithful to your obligations and oath to the Motherland.”*](#)
- [*Friends and foes of Ukraine among religious leaders in Russia*](#)
- [*Religious freedom for non-Orthodox/ Moscow Patriarchate doomed to disappear in Ukrainian lands under Putin’s rule*](#)
- [*Several cases in courts for ‘illegal’ missionary work*](#)
- [*Special Bimonthly FORB Digest \(01–15.03.2022\)*](#)
- [*Orthodox priest reportedly arrested for sermon decrying invasion of Ukraine*](#)
- [*Bellicose rhetoric of Patriarch Kirill of the Russian Orthodox Church in line with Putin’s*](#)
- [*Jehovah’s Witnesses flee Russia for worship without fear*](#)
- [*Address of the Conference of Catholic Bishops of Russia about the war in Ukraine*](#)
- [*Russian religious leaders and movements to be sanctioned – Black List 1*](#)
- [*The end of unity: How the Russian Orthodox Church lost Ukraine*](#)
- [*“Evil forces” fight against Putin’s army in Ukraine, Patriarch Kirill says*](#)
- [*Priests of the Russian Orthodox Church call for reconciliation and ending the war*](#)
- [*Ukrainian and Russian Orthodox priests against the war*](#)
- [*The armed forces of Tatarstan approved the sentence of a Said Nursi Muslim*](#)
- [*Special Bimonthly FORB Digest \(16–28.02.2022\)*](#)
- [*Jehovah’s Witness Konstantin Bazhenov deported to... Ukraine \(!\) after his release*](#)
- [*Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church: Putin is “destroying the basic principles of peace”*](#)
- [*How Putin is exploiting Orthodox rivalries in Ukraine*](#)
- [*The head of the Assembly of Muslims called Russia’s recognition of the Donbas’ independence justified*](#)
- [*23 February: Patriarch Kirill wished Putin peace of mind on Defender of the Fatherland Day*](#)
- [*Two judgments in favour of 14 Jehovah’s Witnesses against Russia*](#)
- [*Special Bimonthly FORB Digest \(01–15.02.2022\)*](#)
- [*Seven Jehovah’s Witnesses sentenced to prison terms since 1 January*](#)
- [*Special Bimonthly FORB Digest \(16–31.01.2022\)*](#)
- [*A Jehovah’s Witness objector to military service fined for evasion of conscription*](#)
- [*Two Jehovah’s Witnesses sentenced to four and seven years in prison*](#)
- [*Aleksei Yershov is already the second Jehovah’s Witness to be sent behind bars in 2022*](#)
- [*Special Bimonthly FORB Digest \(01–15.01.2022\)*](#)
- [*Prospects for religious freedom in Russian-occupied Ukraine*](#)



3 trials in 3 weeks: 11 Jehovah's Witnesses sentenced in all to 67 years and 7 months

About 45 Jehovah's Witnesses have been sentenced to heavy prison terms since 1 January

HRWF (22.12.2022) – In the first three weeks of December, three trials involving 11 Jehovah's Witnesses have resulted in a total number of 67 years and 7 months to be served in prison.

Blagoveshchensk City Court of the Amur Region (21 December 2022)

Sergey Panteleymonovich AFANASIYEV, 58 years (6 years and 6 months)

Sergey KARDAKOV, 38 years (6 months and 4 months)

Anton Yurievich OLSHEVSKIY, 35 years (6 years and 3 months)

Adam Mihaylovich SVARICHEVSKY, 59 years (6 years and 3 months)

Sergey Nikolaevich YERMILOV, 55 years (6 years and 3 months)

Birobidzhan District Court of the EAO (19 December 2022)

Sergey SHULYARENKO, 38 years (7 years)

Valeriy KRIEGER, 55 years (7 years)

Alam ALIYEV, 59 years (6 years and 6 months)

Dmitriy ZAGULIN, 49 years (3 years and 6 months)

Armenian City Court of the Republic of Crimea

Aleksandr Viktorovich LITVINYUK, 62 years (6 years)

Aleksandr Fedorovich DUBOVENKO, 49 years (6 years)

Four Jehovah's Witnesses sentenced to prison for up to seven years (By Willy Fautré, director of Human Rights Without Frontiers)

[European Times](#) (21.12.2022) - On 19 December 2022, Judge Yana Vladimirova at the Birobidzhan District Court of the Jewish Autonomous Region passed harsh sentences to [four Jehovah's Witnesses](#) for supposedly organizing and financing extremist activities while they were in fact merely exercising their right to freedom of religion and assembly.

The investigation and trial lasted an unprecedented four years and a half. The litigation lasted over two years. The prosecutor requested a punishment of four to nine years in prison in a colony.

Operation "Judgment Day"

On 17 May 2018, a [large-scale operation](#) under the code name "Judgment Day" was conducted in Birobidzhan with the participation of 150 security forces. More than 20 families of Jehovah's Witnesses were victims of the raid (e.g., [Newsweek](#); [Kyiv Post](#)).

During this crackdown, Alam Aliyev was arrested and spent eight days in a pre-trial detention center. Later on, three more believers appeared in Aliyev's case: Valery Krieger, Sergey Shulyarenko and Dmitry Zagulin. They were accused of holding joint worship services, which the investigation considered to be the organization of the activities of an extremist organization and its financing.

In total, [23 Jehovah's Witnesses](#) in the region have already been persecuted for the practice of their beliefs. Among them are the wife of Alam Aliyev—[Svetlana Monis](#), the wife of Valery Krieger—[Nataliya Krieger](#) and the wife of Dmitriy Zagulin—[Tatyana Zagulina](#).

The European Court of Human Rights, in its judgment of 7 June 2022, condemned the repression of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia, stating: "*The European Court reiterates that only religious expressions and actions that contain or call for violence, hate or discrimination can serve as a basis for suppressing them as 'extremist' [...] The courts did not identify a single word, deed or action of the applicants, whose motive would be violence, hatred or discrimination against others, or which would have a connotation of violence, hatred or discrimination*" (§ 271).

Mass Raids

Since the 2017 Supreme Court ban, Russian authorities have raided 1874 homes of Witnesses, including 200 this year

- **Mass raids in 2022 (10 or more homes)**
 - Dec 18, Crimea, **16 homes**
 - Oct 6, Primorye Territory, **12 homes**
 - Sept 28, Crimea, **11 homes**
 - Sept 8, Chelyabinsk Region, **13 homes**
 - Aug 11, Rostov Region, **10 homes**
 - July 13, Yaroslavl Region, **16 homes**
 - Feb 13, Krasnodar Region, **13 homes**

Official Statement

Jarrod Lopes, a spokesman for Jehovah's Witnesses, states: "There are over 110 Jehovah's Witnesses in prison in Russia. It's unthinkable that peaceful Christian men like Alam, Dmitriy, Sergey, and Valeriy would be accused of extremist activity and given harsh, lengthy prison sentences usually reserved for violent criminals.(*)

Russian authorities have continued to use a substantial amount of State personnel and resources to conduct mass home raids and imprison Jehovah's Witnesses simply for the practice of their beliefs.

The escalating discriminatory assault against Jehovah's Witnesses is putting a huge burden on a growing number of wives and children to support themselves without the help of their husbands and fathers who were often the family's primary source of income. Innocent children have had their fathers ruthlessly taken away from them at the most critical point in their physical and emotional development. It's hard to believe such gross injustices would happen at all, and even more inconceivable that the systematic persecution—at times including beatings and torture—has continued for more than five years.

(*) 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.

Five Jehovah's Witnesses to serve over six years in prison

HRWF (21.12.2022) – On 21 December, two days after the trial at the Birobidzhan District Court of the Jewish Autonomous Region, another Russian court sentenced five more Jehovah's Witnesses to over six years in prison. They were immediately taken into custody from the courtroom for so-called crimes of extremist activity that included reading the Bible, praying to Jehovah God, singing Christian songs, and discussing the Bible with others.

One of the men, Sergey Yermilov, said in court: "I believe that accusing me of extremist activities is either a gross error of the investigation, or a deliberate distortion of facts in order to discredit Jehovah's Witnesses." (*Excerpt from closing statements Nov 24—[link](#) to full text*)

The sentences were imposed by the same court (Blagoveshchensk City Court of the Amur Region) that in June 2021 imposed the then record-breaking sentence of 8 years on [Aleksey Berchuk](#).

Eight years is the longest sentence imposed thus far since the 2017 ban. [Rustam Diarov](#), [Yevgeniy Ivanov](#), and [Sergey Klikunov](#), from Tartastan were sentenced in October 2021.

Case History

- **2017**, FSB began covert surveillance operations against Jehovah's Witnesses in Blagoveshchensk.
- **July 20, 2018**, local authorities searched seven homes of Witnesses.
- **October 2019**, FSB opened criminal case against Olshevkiy and Yermilov.
- **November 2019**, Yermilov's bank accounts were blocked for claims of financing terrorism.
- **May 2020**, Olshevkiy and Yermilov submitted separate petitions to the investigator to dismiss the criminal case based on the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention's findings weeks earlier, which declared that Russia had violated international law in detaining 18 Jehovah's Witnesses ([link](#)). Olshevkiy and Yermilov petitions were subsequently rejected.
- **September 2020-March 2021**, charges are brought against Afanasiyev, Kardakov, and Svarichevskiy.
- **September 2021**, charges against all five men combined into one criminal case.
- **October 2021**, criminal trial started.

See also December 2022 letter from the Council of Europe's Secretary General to the Russian MFA ([link](#))

No legal provision for alternative civilian service during mobilisation

By Victoria Arnold

Forum 18 (19.12.2022) - https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2797
provision exists for alternative civilian service (ACS) during mobilisation, despite the Constitution guaranteeing this right for every citizen. This has led to military recruitment offices refusing applications for ACS and sending conscientious objectors to military units. Moreover, a November legal amendment allows those already undertaking ACS after being called up for regular military service to be transferred to a non-combat role within the Armed Forces. The amendment effectively "abolishes ACS as a peaceful alternative to military service" during mobilisation, says lawyer Valeriya Vetoshkina.

For reservists whose religious (or other) beliefs prevent them bearing weapons or otherwise serving in the armed forces, the Russian government has made no legal or practical provision for alternative civilian service (ACS) during mobilisation, despite the country's Constitution guaranteeing the right to this for every citizen.



Valeriya Vetoshkina, 5 September 2022, Voice of America

On 21 September, President Vladimir Putin announced the "partial mobilisation" of Russia's military reserve. Within a few weeks, according to the Defence Ministry, more than 300,000 men had been called up. Hundreds of thousands more fled the country to avoid being sent to fight in Russia's war in Ukraine.

The resulting legal limbo has led to military recruitment offices refusing applications for alternative civilian service and sending conscientious objectors to military units. Several such men have challenged their mobilisation in court. So far, only one – Protestant Pavel Mushumansky – is known to have succeeded in having his mobilisation order overturned. Another – Russian Orthodox Christian Kirill Berezin – was unsuccessful in court, but has been permitted to serve in an unarmed role (see forthcoming F18News article).

Russian men aged 18 to 27 are subject to conscription into the armed forces (though many manage to obtain exemptions and deferrals). If a conscript's religious views or pacifist beliefs mean that he refuses to participate in military activities, he may apply for alternative civilian service. Both ACS and military service, however, subsequently place a man in the reserve, rendering him liable to call-up in the future.

Moreover, an amendment to the 1997 Law on Mobilisation, which came into force on 15 November, allows those already undertaking ACS in a civilian-run institution after being called up for regular military service to be transferred from the civilian-run institution to a non-combat role within the Armed Forces. Lawyer Valeriya Vetoshkina believes the

amendment effectively "abolishes ACS as a peaceful alternative to military service" during mobilisation (see below).

The lack of a mechanism to enable ACS for reservists "does not mean that the right of citizens can be crossed out by the inaction of the state", lawyer Sergey Chugunov of the Moscow-based Slavic Centre for Law and Justice commented on his Telegram channel on 25 September. "[Alternative service] is not provided for, but the right is guaranteed. Protect your rights."

Chugunov and other lawyers have encouraged conscientious objectors who have received a summons for mobilisation to lodge applications for ACS anyway. "In the application, you must inform [the mobilisation commission] about your anti-war beliefs or religion and provide a link to Article 59 of the Constitution," Chugunov advised draftees on his Telegram channel on 22 September. "The application will be followed by a refusal, possibly threats of criminal prosecution, so you need to be ready to continue to fight for your constitutional right. The refusal can be appealed in court."

There has been little progress in filling the obvious legal gap. The amendment to the 1997 Law on Mobilisation, which came into force on 15 November, applies only to people already doing alternative service as conscripts at the time mobilisation is announced, and states that they may have to move to civilian roles in the armed forces, if they are not in these already (see below).

In early October, two State Duma deputies from the New People party attempted to introduce a bill which would make alternative service available to reservists under conditions of mobilisation. This appears to have stalled at the committee stage (see below).

Prosecutions for anti-war protestors



Fr Ioann Kurmoyarov Ahilla.ru

Despite the support for Russia's renewed invasion of Ukraine expressed by the leaderships of the Russian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate), the largest Pentecostal Union, the Central Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Russia and some other religious organisations, small numbers of laypeople and clergy continue to voice their opposition on the basis of their faith.

Among the more than 100 individuals who have faced criminal prosecution for opposing Russia's war against Ukraine, three have faced prosecution for opposing the war on



Human Rights Without Frontiers FoRB Russia

religious grounds. One of the three, Fr Ioann Kurmoyarov, is still in pre-trial detention in St Petersburg, and the next hearing in the criminal case is due in January 2023.

Numerous individuals have faced administrative prosecution for opposing the war, in particular for displaying anti-war posters. Among these are some who have been punished for protesting with posters quoting the Bible, the Dalai Lama, or other religious sources.

International human rights law

The right of those with conscientious objections not to be forced to take part in military structures or activity derives from Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which enshrines "Freedom of thought, conscience and religion". In states which have an alternative civilian service, such service must be open to all who object to military service on grounds of conscience and must not be punitive.

Article 4 of the ICCPR states that in "time of public emergency which threatens the life of the nation and the existence of which is officially proclaimed", certain derogations from the rights enshrined in the Covenant "to the extent strictly required" are allowed. However, "no derogation" from the rights enshrined in Article 18 "may be made under this provision".

Russia is a state party to the ICCPR.

What Russian law says

The various provisions of Russia's Constitution, its federal laws, and the amendments introduced after the announcement of mobilisation have left those seeking alternative civilian service in limbo. While the Constitution guarantees the right to alternative service, there is no legal mechanism for it under conditions of mobilisation. As a result, the military authorities generally refuse requests for ACS from those whose religious or other beliefs prevent them either bearing arms or serving in the military at all.

President Putin's partial mobilisation decree of 21 September and its subsequent amendments set out exemptions and deferrals on the basis of age, health, some family circumstances, student status, and employment in particular sectors, including the defence industry – but made no mention of alternative civilian service.

On 25 September, the government information portal "We explain" (obyasnyaem.rf) stated that alternative civilian service is not possible during mobilisation.

– The Constitution

Article 59, Part 3 of the Constitution states: "A citizen of the Russian Federation, if the performance of military service contradicts his beliefs or religion, as well as in other cases established by federal law, has the right to replace it with alternative civilian service."

Under Russian law, the Constitution takes priority over all other legislation (or lack thereof). Some Russian lawyers and human rights defenders have therefore asserted that mobilised men have the right to ACS, regardless of the circumstances.

– 2002 Federal Law on Alternative Civilian Service

This sets out the right to and organisation of ACS solely in terms of conscription (the compulsory twice-yearly call-up of Russian men aged 18-27 who have not served before and are therefore not in the reserve). Under this Law, instead of 12 months of military service, those for whom this goes against their religious or other beliefs can apply to serve

for 18 months in a civilian role in the armed forces, or 21 months in a state-run institution such as a hospital or nursing home.

Article 24 of this Law states that people who do ACS are subsequently enlisted in the reserve, but are not called upon to do military training (conscientious objectors' membership in the reserve is also enshrined in Article 52 of the 1998 "Law on military duty and military service").

Article 9 states: "The organisation and conduct of alternative civilian service during a period of mobilisation, during martial law and in wartime are determined by federal constitutional laws, other federal laws and other regulatory legal acts of the Russian Federation adopted in accordance with them." Existing federal laws do not, however, set out the process of administering alternative service for reservists who either have always been conscientious objectors (and therefore did ACS as conscripts), or whose beliefs may have changed since they performed conscripted military service.

– 2007 "Regulations on the call-up of citizens of the Russian Federation for mobilisation"

These Regulations make no mention of any option of alternative service and do not list the assignment of mobilised men to alternative service among the functions of a mobilisation commission.

– 1997 Law on Mobilisation Preparation and Mobilisation



Sverdlovsk Region Military Conscription Office, Yekaterinburg, 6 April 2020 IvanA [[CC BY-SA 4.0](#)]

This Law also made no mention of alternative civilian service until nearly eight weeks into the "partial mobilisation". A set of amendments which entered legal force on 15 November introduced a new Article 17.1, which stated that conscripts undertaking ACS upon the announcement of mobilisation would be allowed to carry on doing it, but that those who were serving in state institutions may be moved into civilian roles in the armed forces. Lawyer Sergey Chugunov described this amendment on his Telegram channel on 27 October as "more bad news than good", as it means that the law still does not address the possibility of ACS for reservists as opposed to conscripts.

Lawyer Valeriya Vetroshkina of Perviy Otdel – a group of lawyers and human rights defenders - believes the amendment effectively "abolishes ACS as a peaceful alternative to

"military service" during mobilisation. She notes that because mobilisation technically has not ended, any conscript who henceforth applies for ACS may be given a civilian position in Armed Forces, rather than a state institution.

"It does not save [anyone] from the army, but, on the contrary, allows you to send those who are doing alternative service 'in civilian life' to positions as 'civilian personnel', but in the Armed Forces," Vetoshkina commented to the Kholod.Media news outlet on 9 November. "That is, the law not only does not save you from participating in the war, but can involve you in the activities of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation."

Vetoshkina added: "If your beliefs are not to take up arms and not to shoot at people, no one will force you to do this, but if you are against war in principle, be prepared to get as close to it as possible."

Forum 18 is aware of only one example of this amendment helping a draftee avoid mobilisation. A military commissariat in the Chuvash Republic agreed (after twice refusing his application) not to mobilise a man who had requested ACS because he believed military service was "contrary to my beliefs about the value of each person's life, beliefs about non-violence and the unacceptability of complicity in this violence".

In its final letter, which the Call to Conscience Telegram channel reposted on 1 December, the military commissariat cited the new Article 17.1 of the Law on Mobilisation Preparation and Mobilisation. It said that the applicant would not be called up for military service, but "upon the announcement of mobilisation", he would be considered as wishing to undergo ACS as civilian personnel in the military.

"It doesn't say 'conscripts only'"

Lawyers and human rights defenders agree that federal legislation does not provide for alternative civilian service for reservists during mobilisation. They insist, however, that the Constitution guarantees the right to ACS in any case, and that men who object to fighting on religious or other conscientious grounds should therefore lodge applications for ACS and go to court when they are refused.

Call to Conscience (Prizyv k sovesti) is a "coalition of lawyers and experts from Russian human rights organisations for conscientious objection to military service". It argued on its Telegram channel on 15 October that "The obligation to provide the opportunity to perform ACS lies with the state. While such an opportunity does not exist, the state should not mobilise for military service citizens who have stated their beliefs."



Sergey Chugunov, July 2017 Svoboda.org (RFE/RL)

"The Constitution has the highest legal force [and] direct effect.. Laws and other legal acts adopted in the Russian Federation must not contradict the Constitution (Article 15, Part 1 of the Constitution of the Russian Federation)," the law firm Antonov and Partners pointed out on its website on 18 October.

"There are no exceptions that would allow us to say that the replacement of military service with alternative civilian service is impossible during the period of mobilisation," Antonov and Partners added. "This means that citizens have the right to refuse conscription for military service and demand its replacement with alternative civilian service."

"The absence of legal regulation," the firm added, "should not prevent citizens from exercising their constitutional rights."

Sergey Chugunov of the Slavic Centre for Law and Justice also emphasises the overriding force of the Constitution. Between the adoption of the Constitution in 1993 and the passing of the Law on Alternative Civilian Service in 2002, no mechanism for ACS existed, and every young man who conscientiously objected to military service had to go to court, he noted on his Telegram channel on 22 September. During this time, courts, including the Constitutional Court, repeatedly recognised the right of conscripts to perform alternative service.

Chugunov cites a number of Constitutional Court determinations which uphold this right, including one of 22 May 1996, which stated that "the right of citizens whose beliefs or religion are contrary to the performance of military service, which is literally enshrined in the named constitutional norm and does not need to be specified, to replace it with alternative civilian service, like all other rights and freedoms of person and citizen, is directly applicable (Article 18 of the Constitution of the Russian Federation) and must be ensured regardless of whether the relevant federal law has been adopted or not".

"Both the Constitution and the Law on Freedom of Conscience guarantee the right to ACS to all citizens whose beliefs are contrary to military service. It doesn't say 'conscripts only'," Daavr Dorzhin, a lawyer for the Memorial human rights group commented to the Call to Conscience Telegram channel on 25 October.

Dorzhin noted that it is not yet possible to actually do alternative service because there is no procedure, but citizens have the right to request it. "Usually, the military authorities answer that ACS is not provided for during a period of mobilisation. It is best to continue the correspondence: indicate that you do not agree with such an answer and ask them not to call you up until the adoption of [relevant] legislation."

"A believer .. has the right to have his own religious beliefs"



Pavel Chikov, June 2019 North Caucasus Service (RFE/RL)

Pavel Chikov, of the Agora human rights group, noted on his Telegram channel on 16 October the risk that believers may also be refused ACS because many Russian religious organisations do not explicitly forbid participation in military hostilities.

Chikov added that it is therefore important to be aware that the Constitutional Court determined on 23 November 1999 that a citizen's right to alternative service under Article 59 of the Constitution must be upheld on the basis of the individual's own beliefs, regardless of membership of any religious organisation.

In early October, the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the Republic of Tatarstan (DUM-RT) declared that it is "permissible for Muslims to participate in hostilities in the ranks of the Russian army".

Call to Conscience pointed out that this does not mean Muslims cannot request ACS. "Every citizen has the right to their own religious beliefs," it noted on Telegram on 8 October. "Every religion has a tradition of peacemaking – the ideas of peace, justice and non-violence. A religious organisation can support war, and military actions, bless weapons for war – as, unfortunately, the Russian Orthodox Church does – or allow participation in war like the DUM-RT. But a believer, even as a member of this organisation, has the right to have his own religious beliefs, different from the official position."

Call to Conscience lawyers advise that draftees should state in their applications for ACS that their requests are connected to personal religious beliefs, and ask friends, relatives, and fellow believers to confirm their views.

Further possible legal changes?



State Duma, Moscow, North Caucasus Service (RFE/RL)

On 7 October, State Duma deputies Sardana Avksentyeva and Maksim Gulin of the New People Party proposed a set of amendments (№ 207803-8 in the Duma's online record) to the 1997 Law on Mobilisation Preparation and Mobilisation and the 2002 Law on Alternative Civilian Service, which would make the option of alternative civilian service available to reservists during mobilisation and expand the number of categories of citizens eligible to undertake it (by adding various personal circumstances, such as being the son or brother of a soldier who has died while serving).

In their attached explanatory note, Avksentyeva and Gulin note that "the question of the forms and methods of using citizens undergoing alternative civilian service during the period of mobilisation, during martial law and in wartime, as yet remains unresolved", and that "This legal gap may hinder the implementation of the constitutional right to replace military service with alternative civilian service during call-up for mobilisation."

The amendments would introduce a new Paragraph 3.1 to Article 17 of the Law on Mobilisation, stating: "Citizens in the reserve have the right to replace military service with alternative civilian service during the period of partial mobilisation and can be sent to work as provided for in Article 4 of Federal Law No. 113 'On Alternative Civilian Service', including to ensure the safety of educational organisations."

Article 2 of the latter ("The right of a citizen to replace military service by conscription with alternative civilian service") would also be amended to expand this right explicitly to periods of full and partial mobilisation.

The draft law's progress appears to have stalled at the committee stage, however, with the Duma's Defence Committee concluding that various aspects of it conflict with existing federal law, most notably that "The draft provisions do not take into account the fact that, in accordance with Article 3, Paragraph 1 of [the 2002 Law on Alternative Civilian Service], alternative civilian service is undertaken by male citizens aged 18 to 27 years who are not in the reserve".

This appears to be because the deputies failed to suggest an amendment including reservists in this law's Article 3 ("Citizens assigned to alternative civilian service").

The registration of the draft law "confirms the rightness [pravota] of human rights activists that the constitutional right of citizens to ACS must be upheld", Aleksey Tabalov, head of the human rights organisation Shkola prizvaniya, commented on 7 October. "And this is not a citizen's problem, but a legislator's problem, if there is still no such law. We continue to recommend that everyone who wants to avoid being called up for mobilisation apply to military recruitment offices for the replacement of military service with alternative civilian

service."

It is unlikely, however, that the Duma will pass these amendments, lawyer Sergey Chugunov told Forum 18 on 7 December, "even if they want to settle [the issue] of ACS during mobilisation". He noted that such a draft law "should regulate the procedure for assigning [people] to ACS – how, where, and when to apply, how a decision is made, etc., but there is nothing like that in it".

Duma deputies have proposed two more draft laws which may have an effect on alternative civilian service during mobilisation. One of these (Nº 220951-8), registered on 25 October, would add a new Paragraph 2.1 to Article 17 of the Law on Mobilisation, exempting citizens who have not undertaken military service from call-up in the partial mobilisation.

The explanatory note acknowledges that "citizens have been mobilised who did not completed military service and did not have relevant experience". It does not, however, explicitly mention reservists who did ACS as conscripts. This could be considered by the Duma in its spring session in 2023.

The other draft law (Nº 214382-8), registered on 17 October, also appears to have stalled at the committee stage. It would add to the Law of Mobilisation more categories of citizen eligible for a deferment of service, including "those undergoing alternative civilian service". It does not specify how long a deferment and does not mention people who have already completed ACS.

The Defence Committee argued in its conclusion of 7 November that this contradicts the 2002 Law on Alternative Civilian Service, according to which those who have done ACS are placed in the reserve and are therefore liable to call-up.

Conscientious objection and the war in Ukraine, a major court decision

The commandment "Don't kill" stood in court

**By Anna Nikitina and Alexander Tvoropysh
Advokatskaya Ulitsa/ Lawyer Street, a group of Russian lawyers**

The Process: "Special Military Operation"

**Advokatskaya Ulitsa/ Lawyer Street (30.11.2022) -
<https://advstreet.ru/article/zapoved-ne-ubiy-ustoyala-v-sude/> -** A person who once completed alternative civilian service can no longer be sent to the active army during mobilization. This decision was made an hour ago by the Gatchina court in the region of St Petersburg in the case of a convinced pacifist, Evangelical Christian Pavel Mushumansky. In 2019-2021, he worked at the PNI instead of conscription, but in September 2022 he was mobilized on an equal footing with those who served - and even sent to a military unit. Now the order to mobilize Mushumansky has been canceled. His counsels approve this decision, but expect the Constitutional Court to decide on the right to ACS during mobilization.

A life according to the commandments

Pavel Mushumansky was drafted into the army in a peaceful 2019. He immediately announced his desire to undergo [alternative civil service](#) (ASA). In fact, this is a usual paid work in public institutions - such as hospitals or nursing homes. If the conscript's beliefs do not allow him to take up arms, he can choose 21 months of AGS instead of 12 months in the army. Such a right is ensured by Part 3 of Art. 59 of the Constitution and the Federal Law on Alternative Civil Service.

Mushumansky explained that he is a deeply believing **Evangelical Christian** - and that military service contradicts his religion. The draft commission of the Gatchina municipal district of St. Petersburg agreed with this argument. From July 2019 to April 2021, Pavel Mushumansky worked as a conscientious objector at the Kingisepp Psychoneurological Boarding School, and then returned to normal life.

Then the "special operation" began. And on 21 September 2022, President Putin announced a "partial mobilization" to replenish the army. On 24 September, Mushumansky received a summons to the military registration and enlistment office. The next day he went there, again told about his Christian beliefs - and reminded that he was "alternative". However, the commission replied that "the law does not regulate the procedure for sending citizens for alternative civil service instead of military mobilization service." Mushumansky was taken to a military unit, where he is still located. The man fundamentally refused to follow orders and wear military uniforms.

At a crossroads

In early October, 23-year-old Pavel Mushumansky soon filed an administrative claim to Gatchina City Court from his unit. He demanded that the decision to mobilize be declared illegal. A preliminary court session [was held on](#) 15 November at which the court [suspended the](#) decision of the draft commission and the effect of the summons to send him to the "place of service". However, this did not give Mushumansky the right to leave the unit.

Representatives of the mobilized - the lawyer Alexander Peredruk and the lawyer Arseny Levinson - asked the Gatchina court to seek clarification of the situation in the Constitutional Court. Later, this petition was supplemented and sent back to court (Advokatskaya Ulitsa has a document).

The petition states that some provisions of the Mobilization Act do not comply with the Constitution. For example, paragraphs 2-4 of Article 17 states: the state may mobilize citizens who are in reserve and do not have the right to postpone. Nothing is said about ACS (Alternative Civilian Service) and religion; the only exception is a criminal record for certain serious crimes. As "Advokatskaya Ulitsa" told us, now even a conviction for serious crimes does not give a deferment - in Buryatia, the defendant in the case of attempted murder [was mobilized](#).

The ACS is mentioned only in Article 17.1 - but it applies only to those who are already an "alternative" at the time of the mobilization announcement. At the same time, paragraphs 21 and 22 of the [Regulations](#) on the Mobilization of Citizens list the functions of the relevant draft commissions. And there is also no mention of the possibility of the commission to send a person to the ACS, Mushumansky's representatives point out.

Peredruk and Levinson believe that the constitutional right to ACS should be preserved during mobilization. This absence violates the principles of freedom of conscience and religion. The defenders admit that Art. 56 of the Constitution allows the restriction of certain rights and freedoms of citizens during the state of emergency - but definitely not the right to freedom of conscience and religion.

The law on alternative civilian service says that the alternative civilian service "in the period of mobilization, martial law and wartime" is determined by federal laws and other normative legal acts. Thus, the legislator confirmed the possibility of choosing the alternative civilian service during the mobilization period, according to Pereruk and Levinson, but has not yet developed an appropriate mechanism.

"Advokatskaya Ulitsa" talked to representatives of Mushumansky on the eve of the meeting. They stated that the Gatchina court was at a fork. The first option is to recognize Pavel Mushumansky's right to "repeat" ACS. The second is to satisfy the plaintiffs' petition and ask the Constitutional Court to study the legal gap with the ACS during the mobilization period. This would also help other Russians who demand the right to ACS during the mobilization period.

Arseny Levinson noted that in 1996 and 1999 the Constitutional Court defended the right to ACS for conscripts. "It is clear that then the times were different, and the composition of the Constitutional Court is also much more free-thinking and focused on the protection of human rights, not state interests," he said. "But we hope that the Constitutional Court will not abandon the legal positions formulated by it. After all, Russia was the first state in the world to introduce the institution of alternative service - this is our national, traditional value."

Alexander Peredruk added that at this stage of the proceedings, only the Gatchina court has the opportunity to seek clarification from the Constitutional Court. "In my opinion, he even has to do it," said the lawyer.

"It's abnormal, he shouldn't be in the army"

The meeting was held on 30 November and lasted more than three hours. At the beginning, Alexander Peredruk briefly reminded the court of the Christian beliefs of the principal. He said that Mushumansky in part does not carry out orders, does not wear a uniform - and even refused to receive cash payments due to the mobilized. Then the court studied the petition to send a request to the Constitutional Court - and denied it. The "motivation" for the decision is not yet available.

"Our position at the meeting was quite simple. We said that the court should proceed from the norms prescribed in the Constitution - despite the absence of a federal law. This position has been repeatedly expressed by both the Constitutional and the Supreme Court," said Peredruk.

Two hours later the defendant surprisingly demanded to close the meeting from the media. He explained that he could mention documents constituting official secrets. The court agreed with this argument - and journalists were asked to leave the hall.

"We proceeded to the consideration of the case on the merits, examined the evidence," said Peredruk. - As a result, the court declared illegal the decision to call Mushumansky for military service for mobilization. But, unfortunately, so far only the introductory and

resolution parts have been announced, without "motivation". As soon as the court makes this decision, we will study it carefully."

The lawyer suggests that Mushumansky should be returned home from the unit as soon as the court's decision comes into force. "His status as a serviceman is lost," Peredruk added. "There is no reason to keep him."

The lawyer suggests that Mushumansky should be returned home from the unit as soon as the court's decision goes into effect. "His status as a serviceman is lost," Peredruk added. - There is no reason to keep it."

At the same time, it is still unclear whether Mushumansky should carry out again the ACS - now "mobilization". "It's too early to move ahead. The decision of the draft commission on mobilization has been canceled, no other decision has been made," said Peredruk. "What will happen next is a task of the executive power, not the judiciary."

In his opinion, this court decision is important primarily for those citizens who, like Mushumansky, previously opted for the ACS. On the day before, the City Court of St. Petersburg refused to replace the military service with an alternative one to the mobilized citizen Kirill Berezin from St. Petersburg. "But he, unlike Pavel Mushumansky, used to perform military military service. These are still different things," Peredruk stressed. - This does not mean that you can ignore the new views that people formed after serving in the army. But here Pavel Mushumansky is an "ideal applicant" because he has consistently professed his views for many years. The draft commission previously recognized his right to pass the ACS - and what has changed since then? Nothing. His views only strengthened. Of course, the state had to take this into account when making a decision. Unfortunately, the draft commission did not do it, but the court did it. Such a court decision is welcome. It's a real act of justice."

Authors: **Anna Nikitina**, Alexander Tvoropysh
Translation Russian – English by Human Rights Without Frontiers

Religious conscientious objectors and the war in Ukraine

HRWF (19.12.2022) – On 30 November 2022, a Russian court ruled as illegal the decision to call up a Protestant draftee for military service under cover of mobilization due to the said draftee's implementing an Alternative Civilian Service (ACS) in 2019-2021.

This decision is very important for hundreds of young Jehovah's Witnesses who have performed an alternative civilian service for two years in the past. Their lawyers can use this court decision if any of them are suddenly mobilized.



The case of Pavel Mushumansky, an Evangelical believer

HRWF with [Sova Center](#) (19.12.2022) - On 30 November 2022, the Gatchina City Court of the Leningrad Region declared illegal the decision to recruit Pavel Mushumansky, who had previously carried out an alternative civilian service instead of military service.

In 2019, Mushumansky was called up for military service and wrote an application for the ACS (Alternative Civilian Service), as he is an Evangelical Christian and his beliefs do not allow him to take up arms.

After the announcement of the mobilization, the young man was summoned and sent to a military unit. He appealed to the court, which took interim measures suspending the decision to mobilize him until the case is considered on the merits.

Having considered the case, the court declared illegal the decision to call up Mushumansky for military service under mobilization due to the previous implementation of the ACS (2019-2021) by the conscript.

Now the order to mobilize Mushumansky has been canceled.

Mushumansky's defense asked the Gatchina Court to apply to the Constitutional Court for clarification of the situation, since, as noted in their petition, some provisions of the Mobilization Law do not comply with the Constitution. In particular, paragraphs 2-4 of Article 17 states that the state may mobilize citizens who are in reserve and do not have the right to deferral, but neither the passage of the ACS nor religion are mentioned as grounds for exclusion. Lawyers Alexander Peredruk and Arseny Levinson believe that the constitutional right to alternative civilian service should be preserved in case of mobilization.

A group of Russian lawyers (Advokatskaya Ulitsa) analyzed around 350 court decisions from 2021 to the beginning of 2022 concerning conscientious objection issues. It appears that about 10-12% of the cases were concluded in favor of draftees. In the practice of Advokatskaya Ulitsa, it is almost half of the cases. If a draftee loses a trial, it is not the end, they say, because it is possible to apply for ACS again in the next draft.

Sources

- [The court for the first time declared illegal the call for mobilization](#) // TG channel of lawyer Pavel Chikov. 2022. November 30.
- [Nikitina A., Tvoropysh A. THE COMMANDMENT "DON'T KILL" STOOD IN COURT](#) // LAWYER STREET. 2022. NOVEMBER 30.

The case of Kirill Berezin, a believer of an unidentified religious community

HRWF with [Sova Center](#) (19.12.2022) - For a believer of St. Petersburg, two courts refused to apply the ACS (Alternative Civilian Service) instead of military mobilization service, but in part agreed to give him a job without the use of weapons.

On 29 November, the St. Petersburg City Court rejected the application of Kirill Berezin to replace military service by an alternative civilian service on the ground that it was contradicting his religious beliefs. Late in the evening, he was taken to a military unit located in Kamenka in the Leningrad region.

His request was first dismissed by the Nevsky District Court.



Berezin was called up for mobilization and sent to the military unit in Belgorod. Because of an attempt through the court to obtain a transfer to the ACS, he had a conflict with the commander who threatened him. He arbitrarily left the unit, but immediately pleaded guilty.

The court refused to transfer Berezin to the ACS but according to his lawyer Nikifor Ivanov, the commander of the training unit near St. Petersburg agreed to provide him with a job that does not require carrying weapons.

Berezin is an orphan in whose care is his elderly grandmother.

Recall that the Gatchina City Court for the first time overturned the decision to mobilise a believer who had previously opted for the ACS.

Sources

- [The court denied a mobilized St. Petersburg resident the right to replace military service with civilian service](#)// Kommersant. 2022, October 19.
- [The city court rejected the mobilized St. Petersburg citizen who seeks the AGS](#) // Fontanka.ru. 2022, November 29.
- [The loser of the court on alternative service St. Petersburg citizen went to the military unit as a private](#), Nevsky News. 2022, November 30.

A research by Willy Fautré, director of Human Rights Without Frontiers (HRWF)

Photo: Author: Marylin Nieves. Credit: Getty Images.

Religious freedom and issues – Bimonthly Digest (01–15.12.2022)

14.12.2022 - Ukraine handed over to the Russian Federation the rector of the Lisichansky Cathedral, convicted for transferring information about the Armed Forces of Ukraine to the Russians

Strana.today - Ukraine handed over to the Russian Federation the rector of the Lisichansky Cathedral, the priest Andriy Pavlenko . The video with him is published by the Russian media.

The priest was imprisoned for 8 months and a week ago he was sentenced to 12 years in prison for treason (he was accused of passing information about the Armed Forces of Ukraine to the Russians).

The Russian Federation claims that the exchange took place "thanks to the efforts of PMC" Wagner".

[Continue reading...](#)

13.12.2022 - Sentence passed in Murmansk for statements against representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church

Sova Center - On November 30, 2022, the Leninsky District Court of Murmansk delivered a sentence under Part 2 of Art. 280 of the Criminal Code (public calls for extremist activity) to a 44-year-old resident of the city.

According to the court, on November 30, 2019, he wrote a statement from his account on one of the social networks "containing a call for the implementation of hostile, violent, aggressive actions against" representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC).

[Continue reading...](#)

12.12.2022 - Prosecutors reach the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation, seeking the annulment of a rare acquittal of Jehovah's Witnesses

Link to full text in Russian : <https://jw-russia.org/news/2022/12/121611.html>

The case will be heard by the Judicial Board for Criminal Cases of the Russian Supreme Court. This Court will deal with the direct consequences of its own decision to liquidate and ban all Jehovah's Witnesses organizations in Russia, handed down in 2017.

On December 15, 2022, three residents of Kamchatka, who profess the faith of Jehovah's Witnesses, will appear before the Criminal Collegium of the Supreme Court of Russia. Spouses-teachers and a pensioner were found guilty of participation in the activities of a banned organization, but were acquitted by the Kamchatka Regional Court. The prosecutor's office filed for a verdict of acquittal for the second cassation submission.

[Continue reading...](#)

09.12.2022 - State Duma deputy wants to develop another law on healers

Sova center - On December 2, 2022, the head of the State Duma Committee on Family Affairs, Nina Ostanina (KPRF), announced her intention to prepare a bill on criminal liability for fraudulent healers.

"We have a law on healing activity, nothing needs to be adopted. As far as punishment is concerned, this is my initiative. Too many divorced all kinds of scammers who, starting with the fact that people are left without apartments, money, but also cause irreparable damage to health , "she said.

[Continue reading...](#)

08.12.2022 - The cassation instance reduced the term of imprisonment for a follower of Said Nursi



Sova center - Ilgar Aliyev was released. He was deprived of Russian citizenship and is going to be deported to Azerbaijan.

On November 22, 2022, the Fifth Court of Cassation of General Jurisdiction reduced by two years the term of imprisonment of a follower of the Turkish theologian Said Nursi, Ilgar Aliyev, who was convicted in 2018 under CC. 1 and 1.1 Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code (organization of the activities of an extremist organization and involvement in its activities), excluding part 1.1 from the verdict.

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07.12.2022 - In the Khabarovsk Territory, they fined for preaching and are going to expel a US citizen from the country

Sova Center - On December 7, 2022, it became known that in the Sovetsko-Gavansky district of the Khabarovsk Territory, a court found a US citizen guilty under Part 2 of Art. 18.8 of the Code of Administrative Offenses (violation by a foreign citizen or stateless person of the rules for entry into the Russian Federation or the regime of stay (residence) in the Russian Federation) and declared his stay in Russia illegal. He was fined two thousand rubles and will be expelled from the country.

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07.12.2022 - In the Shadow of Russia: Jehovah's Witnesses and Central Asia

Bitter Winter - On December 2, 2022, CESNUR, the Center of Studies on New Religions, organized an international webinar on the theme "In the Shadow of Russia: Jehovah's Witnesses and Religious Freedom in Central Asia."

Central Asia is an area once part of the Soviet Union that includes five countries, with a total population of 73 million. Uzbekistan accounts for almost half of the population (33 million). The largest and richest (because of oil and gas) of the five countries, Kazakhstan, is as large as all Western Europe, and has a population of 19 million. Follow Tajikistan, approaching 10 million, and Turkmenistan and Kyrgyzstan, with 6.5 million each.

[Continue reading...](#)

07.12.2022 - Chelyabinsk resident Vadim Gizatulin received a suspended sentence for his faith. The court considered extremism the discussion of the Bible and prayers to Jehovah God

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2022/12/071526.html>

On December 7, 2022, the judge of the Metallurgical District Court of the city of Chelyabinsk, Vitaly Sirotin, found Vadim Gizatulin guilty of participating in extremist activities. The court sentenced an electrician who professes the religion of Jehovah's Witnesses to a suspended sentence of 2 years in prison.

The verdict has not entered into force and can be appealed.

Vadim Gizatulin faced persecution for his faith in February 2018. Then the security forces of the Chelyabinsk region initiated operational-search activities against local believers. A year later, Gizatulin was searched as part of the Vladimir Suvorov case , in which he was a witness. Vadim himself became a defendant in a criminal case in August 2021. After 2 months, they came to the believer with a second search. Since July 2022, Gizatulin has been under house arrest.



[Continue reading...](#)

05.12.2022 - An appeal in Nizhny Novgorod upheld another guilty verdict for faith. Maksim Zavrazhnov, 41, was sentenced to six years suspended sentence

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2022/12/051531.html>

On December 5, 2022, the Nizhny Novgorod Regional Court approved the sentence to Maksim Zavrazhnov—6 years suspended sentence for reading the Bible. The believer still insists on his innocence and has the right to appeal this decision in the cassation procedure. Maksim Zavrazhnov never denied that he was a Jehovah's Witness and together with his friends he read the Bible and prayed to God. In court, he stressed: "My goal was not to continue the activities of the liquidated legal entity, but to worship God."

[Continue reading...](#)

05.12.2022 - The Cassation Court sent the case of Yelena Menchikova from Cherkessk for a new trial.

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2022/12/051450.html>

On December 5, 2022, the Fifth Cassation Court of General Jurisdiction in the city of Pyatigorsk overturned the verdict and the appeal ruling in the case of 58-year-old Yelena Menchikova, who is disabled, and sent her case for a new trial before other judges. The believer's sentence was announced in December 2021. Two months later, the appellate court confirmed her sentence, but waived her court costs.

[Continue reading...](#)

02.12.2022 - In Armyansk two believers were sentenced to six years in prison.

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2022/12/021730.html>

On December 1, 2022, Tatyana Fedeneva, judge of the Armyansk City Court of the Republic of Crimea, found Aleksandr Litvinyuk and Aleksandr Dubovenko guilty of extremism and sentenced them to 6 years in a penal colony—exactly what the prosecutor requested for them. The believers were taken into custody in the courtroom.

[Continue reading...](#)

01.12.2022 - Sergey Polyakov, one of Jehovah's Witnesses from Omsk, was released.

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2022/11/301613.html>

On November 30, 2022, Sergei Polyakov's sentence ended and he was released. The believer fully served the appointed term of imprisonment - 3 years, of which he actually spent about 1.5 years in the colony.

In November 2020, a district court found Polyakov guilty of extremism because of his religion. After an appeal confirmed the verdict in May 2021, Sergey was transferred to



Valdai, which is 3,000 kilometers from his hometown. The journey took almost 2 months, and in August he arrived at correctional colony No. 4 in the city of Valdai.

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Three Jehovah's Witnesses: Guilty, guilty, then acquitted but maybe guilty again

The Russian Supreme Court did not take the opportunity to uphold justice for innocent believers from Kamchatka

HRWF with JW-Russia.org (15.12.2022) - On December 15, 2022, the Judicial Board for Criminal Cases of the Russian Supreme Court reversed the acquittal verdict against three of Jehovah's Witnesses and sent their case for a new appeal hearing. The court [contradicted the Supreme Court Plenum's explanations](#), which stated that worship services do not constitute a crime under Article 282.2 of the Russian Criminal Code.

The case was considered by Supreme Court judges Aleksey Shamov, Vasiliy Zykin, and Sergey Zelenin. About 20 people attended, including media and representatives of diplomatic missions from at least six countries. "We regret that the judges departed from the fundamental position of the Supreme Court," says Yaroslav Sivulskiy of the European Association of Jehovah's Witnesses. "The widespread persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia is based on the fact that the ordinary religious practice of believers is wrongly interpreted as a continuation of the organization, which was banned in 2017. The criminal prosecution of our dear fellow believers from Kamchatka is also based on this misunderstanding. To clear up this misunderstanding, the Plenum of the Supreme Court issued a clarification a year ago that is binding on all courts. Our believers are not guilty of anything."

The [case](#)- against [Konstantin](#) and [Snezhana](#) Bazhenov and their acquaintance [Vera Zolotova](#) (born in 1946) - was filed in 2018. All three spent some time behind bars, and their homes were searched. In September 2020, a court found them guilty of participating in the activities of a banned organization and [sentenced](#) them to 2 years of suspended imprisonment. The Kamchatka Territory Court [upheld](#) the conviction on appeal, but in November 2021 the Ninth Court of Cassation of General Jurisdiction in Vladivostok, citing the decision of the Plenum of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation of 28 October 2021, sent the case for a new appellate hearing. On January 18, 2022, the Kamchatka Territory Court [issued a verdict of](#) acquittal, which went into effect immediately. The Court of Cassation upheld that decision, but the Deputy Prosecutor General of Russia asked the Russian Supreme Court to send the case for a new appellate hearing.

Notably, in terms of international law, the believers are innocent and subject to rehabilitation, as in June 2022, the European Court of Human Rights, in its [judgment](#) in the case LRO Taganrog and Others v. Russia (32401/10), ruled that the 2017 decision to liquidate all legal entities of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia, to ban their activities and seize property, to ban printed publications and the official website is illegal; and also ruled to end the criminal prosecution of believers and release prisoners. Since June 2022, the implementation of ECtHR judgments in the Russian Federation was suspended.

At this stage, the case of spouses Bazhenov and Vera Zolotova is being returned to the stage of appeal; their sentence will be reviewed by the Kamchatka Territory Court. They are considered to have been convicted and their sentence has not entered into force.

Profondes inquiétudes concernant l'infiltration de la branche russe de la FECRIS en Belgique

HRWF (07.12.2022) - Human Rights Without Frontiers est très préoccupé concernant l'infiltration depuis des années par des propagandistes pro-Poutine et anti-ukrainiens dans la politique belge, y compris le parlement fédéral de la Belgique

Bitter Winter a récemment publié plusieurs documents d'enquête sur la branche russe de la FECRIS : le [23 novembre](#), le [4 novembre](#) et le [17 octobre](#). Un nouveau document a été publié le [5 décembre](#). Il est intitulé "Novopashin confirme : 'Les anti-sectes russes font toujours partie de la FECRIS'," par Massimo Introvigne.

HRWF (07.12.2022) - Le 19 mai 2017, [Alexander Korelov](#), l'avocat de plusieurs propagandistes orthodoxes radicaux russes bien connus et hostiles aux Témoins de Jéhovah ainsi qu'à d'autres minorités religieuses en Russie, comme Alexander Dvorkin, a été invité par la FECRIS (Fédération européenne des centres de recherche et d'information sur les cultes et les sectes) au Parlement belge à une conférence controversée présidée par le député belge André Frédéric.

L'homme politique belge est le président d'AVISO, identifiée comme une association anti-sectes en Belgique affiliée à la FECRIS. En 2021, il a été nommé président de la FECRIS après avoir été membre de leur conseil d'administration pendant plusieurs années, avec Alexander Dvorkin, ancien vice-président de la FECRIS pendant plusieurs années et connu comme un propagandiste orthodoxe extrémiste. Cette personnalité belge est très utile à la FECRIS car elle peut leur donner accès aux locaux du Parlement fédéral belge pour leurs conférences et bénéficier ainsi d'une certaine aura et d'une légitimité apparente mais fausse.

Le 14 juin 2022, André Frédéric a accueilli une autre conférence de la FECRIS, en tant que président, dans les locaux du Parlement fédéral belge. Et il publie un article dans un grand journal francophone, [Le Soir](#), évoquant leur combat pour l'aide aux victimes de sectes. Les victimes de n'importe quel type d'agresseurs méritent toujours d'être aidées, mais dans le cas de la FECRIS, la soi-disant assistance cache un agenda idéologique anti-sectes. En réalité, la FECRIS, ses affiliés et d'autres groupes anti-sectes stigmatisent et diffament de manière répétée un certain nombre de groupes religieux ou de croyances qu'ils n'aiment pas ou dont ils ont été membres, mais [ils ont perdu un certain nombre d'affaires dans divers tribunaux, un domaine dans lequel HRWF a spécifiquement enquêté](#).

Alors, pendant combien de temps le Parlement fédéral belge va-t-il continuer à tolérer des conférences stigmatisant des communautés convictionnelles minoritaires ?

Alexander Korelov a affirmé avoir des preuves que les Témoins de Jéhovah préparent un coup d'État contre le président Poutine, a déclaré Bitter Winter dans un article publié le 17 octobre. Il convient toutefois de rappeler que les Témoins de Jéhovah sont apolitiques, objecteurs de conscience au service militaire et opposés à la violence.

Pendant des décennies, la branche russe de la FECRIS a semé la haine envers un certain nombre de communautés non orthodoxes dans les esprits de la population russe.

Pendant des décennies, la branche russe de la FECRIS a également alimenté sa propagande inspirée par le Kremlin et l'Eglise orthodoxe russe avec des discours de haine anti-ukrainiens.

Pendant des décennies, la branche russe de la FECRIS a ouvert la voie à la guerre de la Russie contre l'Ukraine avec la bénédiction du Patriarche Kirill de l'Eglise orthodoxe russe alors que la FECRIS, basée dans un pays (la France) connu pour sa doctrine de la laïcité, prétend reconnaître le droit à la liberté de religion.

Depuis de nombreuses années, le vice-président de la FECRIS est le propagandiste orthodoxe russe controversé Alexandre Dvorkin, déclaré persona non grata en Ukraine depuis 2014 et qui, malgré cette interdiction, est toujours membre du conseil d'administration de la FECRIS.

Depuis des décennies, les contribuables français ont été utilisés à leur insu pour financer la FECRIS.

Il est temps pour le président Macron d'écouter Bitter Winter, la récente protestation de 82 experts ukrainiens sur les questions religieuses et d'autres lanceurs d'alerte qui ont à plusieurs reprises tiré la sonnette d'alarme et mis en garde contre l'infiltration en France et dans d'autres pays de l'UE de l'idéologie extrémiste de nationalistes radicaux russes.

Il est également temps que le Président Macron mette fin au financement des discours de haine de la FECRIS contre l'Ukraine, que le député belge André Frédéric se tienne à distance de la FECRIS et que le Parlement fédéral belge mette en place une commission d'enquête sur les activités de la FECRIS en Belgique.

Novopashin confirme :« Les anti-sectes russes font toujours partie de la FECRIS »

[Bitter Winter](#) (06.12.2022) - [Une question importante](#) se pose à propos de la fédération européenne anti-sectes FECRIS : sa relation avec ses organisations affiliées russes, qui [calomnient l'Ukraine](#) depuis au moins 2014 et sont maintenant des partisans enthousiastes de l'invasion russe. Elles contribuent à la propagande russe en diffusant de fausses informations selon lesquelles le gouvernement ukrainien serait dominé par des «sectes.»

La FECRIS déclare qu'elle est en désaccord avec l'invasion russe, mais cela ne peut pas être un argument suffisant si elle continue à être représentée en Russie par certains des plus féroces agitateurs et propagandistes anti-ukrainiens.

Consciente qu'elle avait un problème russe, la FECRIS a décidé de maquiller son site Web. Les organisations russes faisant partie de la FECRIS, [toujours répertoriées comme telles le 31 mars 2022](#), ont disparu de la liste de ses organisations membres sur son site Web [au début du mois d'avril](#). Cependant, il n'a pas été possible de savoir si elles avaient été expulsées ou si la FECRIS avait simplement procédé à un ajustement cosmétique de son site Web.

Les noms des membres du conseil d'administration de la FECRIS sont déposés auprès des services administratifs de la France, où est immatriculée l'organisation et où se trouve son siège social. Nous avons régulièrement consulté cette liste et l'activiste anti-sectes russes le plus farouche, Alexander Dvorkin, est toujours indiqué comme membre du conseil

d'administration. CESNUR, l'organisation mère de Bitter Winter, a écrit à la FECRIS pour demander si les affiliés russes faisaient toujours partie de la fédération et si Dvorkin était toujours membre du conseil d'administration, mais n'a jamais reçu de réponse.

Le 11 novembre dernier, 82 universitaires ukrainiens, dont tous les plus grands spécialistes des religions du pays, [ont écrit au Président français Macron](#) pour lui demander de mettre fin au soutien financier que la France continue d'offrir à la FECRIS, étant donné que la fédération anti-sectes entretient des relations avec des organisations russes qui apportent un soutien actif et important à l'invasion de l'Ukraine du fait de leur propagande.

Les universitaires ukrainiens se doutaient bien que la FECRIS répondrait comme elle l'a fait, qu'elle compte aussi deux organisations ukrainiennes affiliées. Ils ont expliqué que l'une est notoirement pro-russe et que l'autre est inactive depuis des années, et qu'en tout état de cause, ni l'une ni l'autre n'a condamné officiellement la propagande anti-ukrainienne des branches russes de la FECRIS.

La lettre a été à l'origine d'un développement inattendu, qui a en quelque sorte résolu le problème de savoir si la FECRIS s'est contentée de cesser ses relations avec ses affiliés russes ou si elle les a expulsés.

Les affiliés russes de la FECRIS sont eux-mêmes membres d'une organisation nationale anti-sectes appelée «Association russe des centres d'études religieuses et cultuelles» (РАЦИРС / RATsIRS). Son président est Alexander Dvorkin et son vice-président est l'archiprêtre [Alexander Novopashin](#), un activiste anti-sectes anti-ukrainien fanatique de Novosibirsk. Ils sont également les représentants du «Centre d'études religieuses au nom de Hieromartyr Irenaeus of Lyon» de Moscou, lui-même une organisation affiliée à la FECRIS. L'organisation anti-sectes locale de Novosibirsk «Centre d'information et de consultation sur le sectarisme après de la cathédrale au nom du Saint Prince Alexandre Nevsky», dirigée par Novopashin, est une autre organisation russe affiliée à la FECRIS.

Novopashin a décidé de répondre à la lettre des universitaires ukrainiens adressée au Président Macron. Il a fait publier sa réponse [par 4s-info](#) et l'a ensuite reproduite sur [son propre site Web](#). Sans vraisemblablement connaître la plupart des signataires, il les a gratuitement insultés en écrivant qu'ils sont «82 apologistes des sectes ukrainiens qui se disent scientifiques.» Certains de ceux qui ont signé n'ont jamais écrit sur les «sectes», mais ce n'est pas la partie la plus intéressante de la réponse de Novopashin.

Novopashin a écrit que les «pseudo-chercheurs» ukrainiens ont attaqué «la Fédération européenne des centres de recherche et d'information sur les sectes FECRIS, enregistrée en France. Notre centre d'information auprès de la cathédrale au nom du Saint Prince Alexandre Nevsky est un membre correspondant de cette organisation. Mais la plainte mentionne principalement un théologien orthodoxe bien connu, mon ami, le professeur Alexandre Leonidovitch Dvorkin, et, enfin, moi, votre humble serviteur.

Le professeur Dvorkin est le président du Centre d'études religieuses au nom de Hieromartyr Irénée de Lyon, le représentant la FECRIS en Russie. Et je suis le vice-président du Centre. La cible principale des apologistes des sectes, en tant que grand spécialiste russe des sectes, est le professeur Alexandre Leonidovitch Dvorkin. Cette lettre a été envoyée dans l'espoir que le Président de la France influence la FECRIS pour qu'elle expulse le professeur Alexandre Dvorkin et moi-même de l'organisation.»

Comme les catholiques le disent à propos de Rome, «Novosibirsk locuta, quaestio soluta» : lorsque Novosibirsk a parlé, la question a été résolue. Si ceux que Novopashin considère comme les méchants de l'histoire «espèrent» que lui et Dvorkin seront expulsés de la FECRIS, il est clair qu'ils ne l'ont pas encore été. En fait, Novopashin avoue que son centre de Novosibirsk est toujours «un membre correspondant de l'organisation», comme il l'était avant l'invasion de l'Ukraine en 2022. Le centre d'études religieuses de Dvorkin, au nom de Hieromartyr Irenaeus of Lyon, est toujours «le représentant de la FECRIS en Russie.» Personne ne les a expulsés. Pourquoi leurs noms ont-ils disparu du site Internet de la FECRIS est une question à laquelle la FECRIS pourra peut-être répondre.

En attendant, Novopashin clarifie, au bénéfice des universitaires ukrainiens et de la FECRIS, que lui et ses amis continuent à «soutenir activement l'opération spéciale en Ukraine.»

Photo : L'archiprêtre Alexander Novopashin. De Telegram.

Deep concerns about the infiltration of FECRIS' Russian branch in Belgium

HRWF (07.12.2022) - Human Rights Without Frontiers is deeply concerned by the infiltration for years of pro-Putin and anti-Ukrainian propagandists in Belgian politics, including in the federal parliament of Belgium.

Bitter Winter recently published several investigation papers about FECRIS' Russian branch: on [23 November](#), on [4 November](#) and on [17 October](#). A new one was published yesterday on [5 December](#). It is titled "Novopashin confirms: 'Russian anti-cultists are still part of FECRIS' by Massimo Introvigne.

HRWF (07.12.2022) - On 19 May 2017, [Alexander Korelov](#), the lawyer of several well-known radical Russian Orthodox propagandists hostile to Jehovah's Witnesses and other religious minorities in Russia, such as Alexander Dvorkin, was invited by FECRIS (European Federation of Research and Information Centres on Cults and Sects) at the Belgian Parliament to a controversial conference chaired by Belgian MP André Frédéric.

The Belgian politician is the president of AVISO, identified as an anti-cult association in Belgium affiliated to FECRIS. In 2021, he was appointed president of FECRIS after being a member of their board for several years, along with Alexander Dvorkin, former vice-president of FECRIS for several years and known as an extremist Orthodox propagandist and cult-hunter. This Belgian personality is very useful for FECRIS as he can give them access to the premises of the Belgian Federal Parliament for their conferences and hereby enjoy a certain aura and apparent but false legitimacy.

On 14 June 2022, André Frédéric hosted another FECRIS conference, as its president, in the premises of the Belgian Federal Parliament. And he published an article in a leading

francophone newspaper [Le Soir](#) referring to their fight for assistance to victims of cults. Victims of any sort of perpetrators always deserve to be helped but in the case of FECRIS, the so-called assistance hides an ideological anti-cult agenda. In reality, FECRIS, its affiliates and other anti-cult groups repeatedly stigmatize and libel a number of belief or religious groups they do not like or they were formerly members of but [they have lost quite a number of cases in various courts, an area that HRWF has specifically investigated.](#)

So, how long will the Belgian Federal Parliament go on tolerating conferences stigmatizing minority belief communities?

Alexander Korelov claimed to have evidence that Jehovah's Witnesses prepare a coup against President Putin, said Bitter Winter in a breaking news published on 17 October. Though, it is worth reminding that Jehovah's Witnesses are apolitical, conscientious objectors to military service and opposed to violence.

For decades, the Russian branch of FECRIS has sowed hatred towards a number of non-Orthodox communities in the minds of the Russian population.

For decades, the Russian branch of FECRIS has also fed their propaganda inspired by the Kremlin and the Russian Orthodox Church with anti-Ukrainian hate speech.

For decades, FECRIS' Russian branch has paved the way to Russia's war on Ukraine with the blessing of Patriarch Kirill of the Russian Orthodox Church whilst FECRIS, based in a secular country (France) known for its *laïcité* doctrine, claims to recognize the right to freedom of religion.

For many years, FECRIS' vice-president has been the controversial Russian Orthodox propagandist Alexander Dvorkin, declared persona non grata in Ukraine since 2014 and despite this ban, he is still a member of the board of directors of FECRIS.

For decades, taxpayers in France have, without their knowledge, been misused to finance FECRIS.

It is time for President Macron to listen to Bitter Winter, to the recent protest of 82 Ukrainian scholars on religious issues and other whistleblowers who have repeatedly rung the alarm bell and warned against the infiltration in France and other EU countries of the extremist ideology of Russian radical nationalists.

It is also time for President Macron to put an end to the financing of FECRIS' hate speech against Ukraine, for Belgian MP André Frédéric to keep at distance from FECRIS and for the Federal Parliament of Belgium to put up an inquiry commission about the activities of FECRIS in Belgium.

[Novopashin confirms: 'Russian anti-cultists are still part of FECRIS'](#)

[Bitter Winter](#) (05.12.2022) - There is [an important question](#) about the European anti-cult federation FECRIS: its relationship with its Russian affiliate organizations, which [have slandered Ukraine since at least 2014 and are now enthusiastic supporters of the Russian invasion](#). They contribute to Russian propaganda by spreading the fake news that the Ukrainian government is allegedly dominated by "cults."

FECRIS states that it is against the Russian invasion, but this cannot be good enough if it continues to be represented in Russia by some of the most ferocious anti-Ukrainian agitprop peddlers.

Knowing that it had a Russian problem, FECRIS decided to camouflage its website. The Russian organizations that are part of FECRIS, [still listed as such on March 31, 2022](#), disappeared from [the list of its member organizations](#) on its Web site in early April. However, it was unclear whether they had been expelled or FECRIS had just made a cosmetic adjustment of its website.

The names of FECRIS board members are filed with the authorities of France, where the organization is registered and headquartered. We checked periodically and the worst Russian anti-cultist, Alexander Dvorkin, continued to be indicated as a board member. CESNUR, the parent organization of Bitter Winter, wrote to FECRIS asking whether the Russian affiliates were still part of the federation and Dvorkin was still a board member, but never got any answer.

Last month, on November 11, 82 Ukrainian academics, including all the leading scholars of religion in the country, [wrote to French President Macron](#) asking him to discontinue the financial support France continues to offer to FECRIS, given the fact that the anti-cult federation maintains its relationship with Russian organizations that give an active and important propaganda support to the invasion of Ukraine.

The Ukrainian academics knew that FECRIS would have answered, as it did, that it also has two Ukrainian affiliate organizations. They explained that one is notoriously pro-Russian and the other has been inactive for years, and at any rate neither went on record condemning the anti-Ukrainian propaganda by the Russian branches of FECRIS.

The letter generated an unexpected development, which in a way solved the problem of whether FECRIS just went through the motions of discontinuing its relationships with its Russian affiliates or expelled them.

The Russian FECRIS affiliates are in turn part of a national anti-cult organization called Russian Association of Centers for Religious and Cultic Studies (РАЦИРС / RATsIRS). Its president is Alexander Dvorkin and its deputy president is [Archpriest Alexander Novopashin](#), a fanatical anti-Ukrainian anti-cultist from Novosibirsk. They are also the representatives of the Moscow "Center for Religious Studies in the Name of Hieromartyr Irenaeus of Lyon," in itself an affiliate organization of FECRIS. The local Novosibirsk anti-cult organization Information and Consultation Center on Cultism at the Cathedral in the name of the Holy Prince Alexander Nevsky, led by Novopashin, is another Russian affiliate of FECRIS.

Novopashin decided to answer the letter of the Ukrainian scholars to Macron. He had his answer [published by 4s-info](#) and then [reproduced on his own website](#). Presumably without knowing most of those who had signed, he gratuitously insulted them by writing that they are "82 Ukrainian cult apologists who call themselves scientists." Some of those who signed have never written about "cults," but this is not the most interesting part of Novopashin's answer.

Novopashin wrote that the Ukrainian "pseudo-scientists" attacked "the European Federation of Centres for Research and Information on Sects and Cults FECRIS, registered in France. Our Information Center at the Cathedral in the name of the Holy Prince Alexander Nevsky is

a corresponding member of this organization. But the complaint primarily mentions a well-known Orthodox theologian, my friend, Professor Alexander Leonidovich Dvorkin, and, well, me, your humble servant.

Professor Dvorkin is the President of the Center for Religious Studies in the Name of Hieromartyr Irenaeus of Lyon, representing FECRIS in Russia. And I am the vice president of the Center. The main target of cult apologists and cults, as a leading Russian expert on cults, is Professor Alexander Leonidovich Dvorkin. The letter was sent in the hope that the President of France would influence FECRIS to expel Professor Alexander Dvorkin and myself from the organization."

As Catholics say of Rome, "Novosibirsk locuta, quaestio soluta": when Novosibirsk has spoken, the question has been solved. If those Novopashin sees as the villains in the story "hope" that he and Dvorkin would be expelled from FECRIS, it is clear that they have not been expelled yet. In fact, Novopashin confesses that his center in Novosibirsk is still "a corresponding member of the organization," as it was before the 2022 invasion of Ukraine. Dvorkin's Center for Religious Studies in the Name of Hieromartyr Irenaeus of Lyon is still "representing FECRIS in Russia." Nobody has expelled them. Why their names have disappeared from the FECRIS's website is a question that FECRIS may perhaps answer.

In the meantime, Novopashin clarifies, for the benefit of both the Ukrainian academics and FECRIS, that he and his friends continue to actively "support the special operation in Ukraine."

Photo: Archpriest Alexander Novopashin. From Telegram.

Religious freedom and issues – Bimonthly Digest (15–30.11.2022)

28.11.2022 - In Ussuriysk, three of Jehovah's Witnesses were given 6 years of suspended sentence for discussing the Bible

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2022/11/301332.html>

On November 30, 2022, Dmitriy Babushkin, judge of the Ussuriysk District Court of Primorye Territory, found **Sergey Korolchuk, Anton Chermnykh and Dmitriy Tishchenko** guilty of "continuing the illegal activities of a banned religious organization." This is how the authorities interpret the peaceful conversations of Jehovah's Witnesses about the Bible.

All believers received the same sentence: 6 years of suspended term, 4 years of probation, and 1 year of restriction of liberty. The verdict has not yet entered into force and can be appealed.

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

28.11.2022 - Sentence passed in Dagestan in case of four Jehovah's Witnesses

Sova Center - On November 25, 2022, the Kirovsky District Court of Makhachkala sentenced Jehovah's Witnesses **Arsen Abdullayev, Marat Abdulgalimov, and Anton**

Dergalev to six and a half years of suspended imprisonment under Part 1 of Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code (organization of the activities of an extremist organization) and Part 1 of Art. 282.3 of the Criminal Code (financing of extremist activities), and **Maria Karpova** to six years of probation under Part 1 of Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code.

[Continue reading...](#)

24.11.2022 - Investigation of case against three Jehovah's Witnesses completed in Taganrog

Sova center - On November 24, 2022, the Investigation Department of the Investigative Committee for the Rostov Region reported on the completion of the investigation of the criminal case under Part 1 of Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code (organizing the activities of an extremist organization) in relation to three Jehovah's Witnesses. According to investigators, the defendants continued the activities of the community from 2016 to 2021, organizing "worship services and training sessions." Probably, we are talking about **Alexander Skvortsov, Vladimir Moiseenko** and **Valeria Tibia. Skvortsov** became a suspect under Part 1 of Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code in December 2021, since then he has been in jail. In April 2022, information appeared that the suspects under Art. 282 of the Criminal Code became Moiseenko and Tibiy.

[Continue reading...](#)

22.11.2022 - Jehovah's Witness from Chelyabinsk region sentenced to suspended sentence

Sova center - On November 21, 2022, the Ashinsky City Court of the Chelyabinsk Region found 50-year-old Jehovah's Witness **Andrey Perminov** guilty under Part 1 of Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code (organization of the activities of an extremist organization) and gave him a six-year suspended sentence. The materials of the criminal case were received by the court in June. The persecution of Perminov, a disabled person of group I, began in June 2021 after a search was conducted at his place, and at the same time searches were carried out at the homes of Jehovah's Witnesses Andrey and Vadim Fedorov. In November, they took a written undertaking not to leave Perminov; His case went to court on May 6, 2022.

[Continue reading...](#)

22.11.2022 - Volgograd citizen fined for possession of Islamic books

Sova Center - On November 16, 2022, the Dzerzhinsky District Court of Volgograd fined 3,000 rubles under Art. 20.29 of the Code of Administrative Offenses (storage of extremist materials for the purpose of mass distribution) of the father of many children, Kamal Kurbanov.

From the court ruling, it follows that the FSB officers came to the household, for which Kurbanov was responsible and in which, according to the department, a certain religious school operated.

[Continue reading...](#)

21.11.2022 - Believer, 59, placed under house arrest after a day in temporary detention facility. A new criminal case against a Jehovah's Witness in Primorye

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2022/11/211653.html>

On November 18, 2022, in the village of Tavrichanka, a search was carried out in the house of Viktor Chernov, 59. The next day he was interrogated and placed in a temporary detention center for a day. As it became known, the reason for the detention of the believer was the testimony of a secret agent who collected information about Jehovah's Witnesses.

[Continue reading...](#)

21.11.2022 - The court in the Chelyabinsk region issued a guilty verdict to Andrey Perminov. Group I disabled person sentenced to 6 years probation for believing in Jehovah God

Link to full text in Russian : <https://jw-russia.org/news/2022/11/211441.html>

On November 21, 2022, the judge of the Asha City Court of the Chelyabinsk Region, Ravil Nusratov, found **Andrey Perminov**, 50, chained to a wheelchair from his youth, guilty of extremism because of his religion and sentenced him to 6 years of suspended sentence. Andrey Perminov is a disabled person of the group I. The criminal prosecution of the believer began in the summer of 2021, when investigator Yevgeniy Dolgaev opened a criminal case against him, and a series of searches took place in the Chelyabinsk region of those whom the investigation considered to be Jehovah's Witnesses.

[Continue reading...](#)

21.11.2022 - An appeal in Moscow upheld the verdict for Serebryakov and Temirbulatov. Believers sentenced to 6 years of probation

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2022/11/211919.html>

On November 21, 2022, the Moscow City Court rejected the appeals of **Yuriy Temirbulatov, Aleksandr Serebryakov** and their defense lawyers and did not change the sentence—6 years of suspended sentence each. Believers still insist on their complete innocence and can file a cassation complaint.

In August 2022, the Golovinsky District Court of Moscow found the believers guilty of organizing the activities of an extremist organization for participating in religious services of Jehovah's Witnesses.

[Continue reading...](#)

17.11.2022 - In Ivanovo, a criminal case was initiated against Jehovah's Witnesses

Sova Center -On November 9, 2022, three Jehovah's Witnesses from Ivanovo were searched in connection with a new criminal case. Probably, it was initiated under Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code (organization of the activities of an extremist organization or participation in it).

During the searches, personal records, means of communication, memory cards and money were confiscated from believers. Two Jehovah's Witnesses, whose names have not yet been released, have become defendants in a criminal case.

[Continue reading...](#)

17.11.2022 - A court in Krasnoyarsk fined a Jehovah's Witness. Igor Gusev will have to pay the state 600,000 rubles for his faith

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2022/11/171322.html>

In the Krasnoyarsk Territory, another guilty verdict was passed against one of Jehovah's Witnesses: On November 17, 2022, the Zheleznodorozhny District Court of Krasnoyarsk imposed a fine of 600,000 rubles on Igor Gusev, 58. Judge Aleksandr Aksyutenko considered it illegal to discuss the Bible peacefully with fellow believers.

The verdict has not entered into force and can be appealed. The believer insists on his innocence. According to him, the FSB investigator offered to formalize in writing "a renunciation of faith in Jehovah God." In return, the believer was promised to stop the case. "It was at that moment that I realized that I was being tried not for a crime, but for my faith," said Igor Gusev.

[Continue reading...](#)

16.11.2022 - Jehovah's Witness sentenced to real time in Stavropol Territory

Sova Center - On November 14, 2022, the Georgievsky City Court of the Stavropol Territory sentenced Jehovah's Witnesses **Viktor Zimovsky**, who was charged under Part 1 of Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code (organization of the activities of an extremist organization) and Part 1 of Art. 282.3 of the Criminal Code (financing of extremist activities), as well as to spouses Anatoly and Irina Gezik, who were accused under Part 1.1 of Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code (involvement in the activities of an extremist organization), part 2 of Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code (participation in the activities of such an organization) and Art. 156 of the Criminal Code (improper performance of duties for the upbringing of a minor by a parent).

[Continue reading...](#)

16.11.2022 - Prison term, suspended sentence, and corrective labor: three of Jehovah's Witnesses sentenced in Stavropol for their faith

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2022/11/161451.html>

On November 14, 2022, the Georgievsk City Court of the Stavropol Territory found **Viktor Zimovskiy** and the couple **Anatoliy and Irina Gezik** guilty of extremism for professing their faith. This decision was made by judge Nina Anashkina.

The court sentenced Viktor Zimovskiy to 6 years and 2 months in a penal colony (he was taken into custody in the courtroom), Anatoliy Gezik received 4 years and 2 months of corrective labor, and Irina Gezik was given a suspended sentence of 4 years and 2 months. The decision of the court has not entered into force and can be appealed. The believers insist on their complete innocence.

[Continue reading...](#)

Orthodox archpriest Novopashin, a voice of FECRIS in Russia and anti-Ukrainian hate speech

HRWF (23.11.2022) - On 23 November, Bitter Winter published an investigation paper entitled "[Russian Anti-Cult Leader: 'The US and Ukraine Use Satanists to Destroy the Whole Orthodox World'.](#)

By Massimo Introvigne

Bitter Winter (23.11.2022) - Archpriest Alexander Novopashin is the Vice President of Russian umbrella anti-[cult](#) organization RATsIRS, which Novopashin still claims [is affiliated with FECRIS](#), the European federation of anti-cult movements based in France.

Novopashin has repeatedly accused the governments of Ukraine and United States of using Satanists to exacerbate anti-Russian feelings in Ukraine and conduct terrorist attacks and sabotage operation in Russia. [Bitter Winter has continued to denounce](#) the absurdity of these claims, which are part of a Russian propaganda whose purposes are largely domestic, since in the West Novopashin and his friends are quoted mostly to be ridiculed. On the other hand, their influence in Russia should not be underestimated.

In an interview granted on November 8 to [Novosibirsk SM News](#) and republished on his own website [on November 17](#), Novopashin went one step further than usual, and accused the United States and Ukraine of "waging war against the entire Orthodox world, not only against Russia."

Starting from the arrest at the beginning of this month in Simferopol, Crimea, of young Ukrainians presented by the Russian security forces as Satanists who allegedly planned to blow up the local Russian Orthodox church of St Nicholas, Novopashin stated that "the whole of Ukraine has become a horror movie, and the directors and screenwriters are U.S. intelligence officers."

Misquoting, and misspelling the last name of the late British scholar of esotericism Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, Novopashin claimed that the United States government uses criminal Satanic cults that practice human sacrifice for its own purposes. Through "aggressive brainwashing" the U.S. tries to spread Satanism everywhere, but nowhere has it been more successful than in Ukraine. "What the United States managed to achieve in this regard in Ukraine may have exceeded all the expectations of the employees of overseas intelligence agencies themselves," Novopashin proclaimed.

The spread of Satanism and Satanic crimes in Russia, according to Novopashin, "is connected with the work of the Ukrainian special services under the patronage of the United States. In fact, the destructive ideology is not imposed by the United States directly, but through the Ukrainian army department for psychological attacks on the enemy (CIPSO). The entire methodological base of the CIPSO is written according to the standards of similar NATO units," which operate with the same nefarious purposes in other European countries. Throughout Europe and indeed the whole world, Novopashin is "convinced that Satanism and the occult is overseen by the US."

The Special Military Operation, the anti-cultist insists, was needed to "crush one of the main centers of Satanism, which is in Ukraine." However, Novopashin is afraid that many Russians still do not understand what this "fight between good and evil" is all about. Those who believe that the US simply want to destroy a rival superpower are mistaken. The aim of the US is to destroy the Orthodox Church, not only in Russia but everywhere.

One reason is that the Orthodox Church defends the traditional values that the Americans hate. But the ultimate motivation is that "Satanism and the occult," which dominate American and Ukrainian politics, seek death and destruction and ultimately try to unleash the end of the world.

"What Orthodox Christians used to talk about—about the Apocalypse and Armageddon, about the last times —now literally everyone began to talk. Because against the backdrop of ongoing events (same-sex marriages, the desire to legalize pedophilia, gender reassignment, endless wars), this became clear even to those people who previously treated such a term as Satanism with mockery or sharp rejection. And now they have accepted this term as the most accurate and complete characterization of the current state of affairs."

The Orthodox Church is the last obstacle before the Apocalypse. This is why the US needs to destroy it, Novopashin believes.

HRWF comments

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For decades, the Russian branch of FECRIS has also fed their propaganda inspired by the Kremlin and the Russian Orthodox Church with anti-Ukrainian hate speech.

For decades, FECRIS' Russian branch has paved the way to Russia's war on Ukraine with the blessing of Patriarch Kirill of the Russian Orthodox Church whilst FECRIS, based in a secular country (France) known for its *laïcité* doctrine, claims to recognize the right to freedom of religion.

For many years, FECRIS' vice-president, has been the controversial Russian Orthodox propagandist Alexander Dvorkin, declared persona non grata in Ukraine since 2014 and despite this ban, he is still a member of the board of directors of FECRIS.

For decades, taxpayers in France have, without their knowledge, been misused to finance FECRIS.

It is time for President Macron to listen to Bitter Winter, the recent protest of 82 Ukrainian scholars on religious issues and other whistleblowers who have repeatedly rung the alarm bell and warned against the infiltration in France of the extremist ideology of Russian radical nationalists.

It is time for President Macron to put an end to the financing FECRIS' hate speech against Ukraine.

HRWF ANNEX: List of organizations affiliated to FECRIS' Russian branch and mainly headed by Russian Orthodox clergy

1) Новосибирское региональное отделение Центра религиоведческих исследований

Novosibirsk Regional Department of the Centre for Religious Studies

The Chairman of the Regional Department Board of the Centre for Religious Studies – Archpriest Alexander Novopashin, РАЦИРС¹ Vice-President

2) Саратовское региональное отделение Центра религиоведческих исследований

Saratov Regional Department of the Centre for Religious Studies

The Chairman – Alexander Valeryevich Kuzmin

3) Центр по вопросам сектантства при соборе св. благоверного кн. Александра Невского (Новосибирск)

St. Pious Prince Alexander Nevsky Cathedral Centre for the Issues of Sectarism (Novosibirsk)

The Head of the Centre – Oleg Vladimirovich Zaev

4) Информационно-аналитический центр свт. Марка Ефесского (Тверь)

Saint Mark of Ephesus Informational-Analytical Centre (Tver)

The Head of the Centre – Archpriest Alexander Shabanov, РАЦИРС Vice- President, the Chairman of the Missionary Department of the Tver Diocese

5) Центр по проблемам сект и оккультизма (Томск)

Centre for the Issues of Sects and Occultism (Tomsk)

The Head of the Centre – Maxim Valeryevich Stepanenko, the Head of the Missionary Department of the Tomsk Diocese

E-mail: k-istine@mail.ru

6) Миссионерский отдел Тульской епархии.

The Missionary Department of the Tula Diocese

The Chairman – Archpriest Oleg Kuzminov Secretary – Alexei Victorovich Yarasov

7) Миссионерский отдел Санкт-Петербургской епархии /The Missionary Department of the St. Petersburg

The Vice-Chair – Priest Georgy Ioffe

Secretary – Valeria Alexandrovna Rychkova

8) Камчатский апологетический центр свт. Патриарха Ермогена (Петропавловск-Камчатский)

Kamchatka Apologetic Centre of St. Patriarch Yermoghen (Petropavlov- sk-Kamchatsky)

The Head of the Centre – Priest Mikhail Neverov

9) Просветительский отдел Ташкентской и Среднеазиатской Митрополии РПЦ



Human Rights Without Frontiers FoRB Russia

The Enlightenment Centre of the Tashkent and Middle Asia Metropolis of the Russian Orthodox Church

The Chairman – Priest Sergyi Statsenko

10) Общественный центр “Гражданская безопасность” (Ярославль)

Директор

Public Centre “Civil Security” (Yaroslavl)

The Director – Evgeni Olegovich Mukhtarov

11) Миссионерский отдел Рязанской епархии вопросам

The Missionary Department of the Ryazan Diocese

The Chairman – Priest Arseny Vilkov

12) Информационно-консультационный центр по тоталитарных сект (Ставрополь)

Informational-Consultative Centre for the Issues of Totalitarian Sects (Stavropol)

The Head of the Centre – Anton Yurievich Skrynnikov

13) Центр помощи пострадавшим от деструктивных сект (Казахстан) Help Centre for Victims of Destructive Sects (Kazakhstan)

14) Информационно-консультационный центр им. преп. Иосифа Волоцкого при Минской епархии Белорусского Экзархата

Reverend Joseph Volotski Informational-Consultative Centre of the Minsk Diocese of the Belorussian Exarchate

The Head of the Centre, the Adviser on the Questions of New Religious Movements of the Minsk Diocese – Vladimir Alexandrovich Martinovich

15) Антисектантский проект “Гнев” (Новгород Великий) Anti-sectarian Project “Anger” (Veliky Novgorod)

The Leader – Alexandr Igorevitch Chausov

Source: [Freedom of religion or Belief, Anti-sect Movements and State Neutrality: The Case of FECRIS](#)

Photo 1: Alexander Novopashin. From Telegram.

Photo 2: Novopashin lecturing. From Telegram.

Religious freedom and issues – Bimonthly Digest (01-15.11.2022)

15.11.2022 - In Novosibirsk, 67-year-old Aleksandr Seredkin was sentenced to six years in prison for reading the Bible

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2022/11/151422.html>

On November 15, 2022, the consideration of the case of **Aleksandr Seredkin** was completed in the Oktyabrsky District Court of Novosibirsk. Judge Yevgeny Zakharov considered holding religious meetings, saying prayers and reading the Bible extremist and sentenced the believer to six years in a penal colony. He was taken into custody in the courtroom.

Criminal case under Part 1 of Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation against Seredkin was initiated in April 2019 by the senior investigator for especially important cases of the Federal Security Service of Russia in the Novosibirsk Region, Lieutenant Colonel of Justice E. V. Selyunin. The believer was accused of "organizing meetings and directing the reading and discussion" of religious literature.

[Continue reading...](#)

15.11.2022 - ECtHR awards compensation to protester against church in Yekaterinburg

Sova Center - On November 10, 2022, the European Court of Human Rights ruled in the case of Tsvetkov and Others v. Russia, which brought together the complaints of several applicants accused under various articles of the Code of Administrative Offenses of the Russian Federation and who considered their trials to be insufficiently impartial. The ECtHR considered the complaints admissible, finding a violation of paragraph 1 of Art. 6 of the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (right to a fair trial) and ordered that the applicants be paid the sums claimed.

[Continue reading ...](#)

11.11.2022 - Court in Volgograd toughens punishment for five defendants in case of involvement in Tablighi Jamaat

Sova center - The conditional imprisonment was replaced for three defendants with a real term.

On November 11, 2022, the Volgograd Regional Court considered the appeal of the prosecutor's office against the sentence of five local residents convicted of participating in the Tablighi Jamaat religious association banned in Russia under Part 2 of Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code (participation in the activities of an extremist organization). In September, the Sovetsky District Court of Volgograd sentenced all the defendants in the case to two years of suspended imprisonment with a two-year probationary period. After consideration of the case in the court of appeal, the sentences of three of them - Amanat Lukpanov, Batr Urazov and Gilman Nitaliev - were toughened, replacing the punishment with real imprisonment in a general regime colony. Two other convicts - Aslan Vakuev and Alexander Kolesnikov - the sentence was left unchanged. In addition, all convicts were sentenced to 10 months of restriction of freedom.

[Continue reading...](#)

10.11.2022 - An appeal in the Vologda Region softened the sentence of one of the convicted Jehovah's Witnesses

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2022/11/101636.html>

On November 10, 2022, the Vologda Regional Court reviewed Nikolay Stepanov's sentence for holding religious services. 4 years in prison were replaced with a suspended sentence. The verdict of Yuriy Baranov, another person involved in the case, sentenced to 4 years suspended, was left unchanged.

Stepanov and Baranov became targets of criminal prosecution in December 2019, when a massive raid took place in the homes of Jehovah's Witnesses in Vologda. On September 5, 2022, the court of first instance issued a guilty verdict, which the believers appealed.

[Continue reading...](#)

08.11.2022 - In Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky, Dmitriy and Nadezhda Semyonov were given four years suspended sentence for sharing Bible message

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2022/11/081653.html>

On November 8, 2022, the judge of the Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky City Court Vladimir Bykov found the spouses **Dmitriy and Nadezhda Semenov** guilty of extremism and appointed 4 years suspended sentence to each. The verdict can be appealed.

The Semenovs learned about the criminal prosecution in September 2021 — a search was conducted in their house, the believers were interrogated and then released on recognizance not to leave. Three days before, the investigator of the Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation for the Kamchatka Territory, Maxim Kudantsev, opened a criminal case against the Semenovs under Part 1.1 of Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation (involvement in the activities of an extremist organization).

[Continue reading...](#)

08.11.2022 - A Court in Penza Region sentenced Viktor Shayapov to two years suspended sentence for believing in Jehovah God

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2022/11/081647.html>

On November 7, 2022, Judge of Nikolsky District Court of the Penza Region Nikolay Razdrogin sentenced one of Jehovah's Witnesses **Viktor Shayapov**, 32, to 2 years' suspended sentence with 8 months' probation. The believer received such a punishment for the peaceful practice of his religion.

Viktor became a defendant in a criminal case for his faith in October 2020. At that time, a wave of searches took place in Nikolsk at the homes of local Jehovah's Witnesses, including the Shayapov family. In February 2022, Shayapov was detained in the Moscow region, taken to Penza and placed under house arrest. He spent almost 9 months in isolation from society with a location-tracking bracelet on his leg. The believer was also included in the Rosfinmonitoring list.

[Continue reading...](#)

08.11.2022 - The Court of Cassation upheld the verdict against five Jehovah's Witnesses from Nevelsk

Link to full text in Russia: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2022/11/081642.html>

On November 8, 2022, the Ninth Court of Cassation of General Jurisdiction in Vladivostok approved the conviction of five believers from Nevelsk — their suspended sentences of two to six-and-a-half years remain unchanged.

In January 2022, the Nevelsk City Court of the Sakhalin Region found Sergey and Tatyana Kulakov, Vyacheslav Ivanov, Aleksandr Kozlitin and Yevgeniy Yelin guilty of either organizing or participating in the activities of an extremist organization. Three months later, the Sakhalin Regional Court dismissed the believers' appeal against the verdict.

The fact that the criminal persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses continues contrary to Russian law causes bewilderment and misunderstanding among the international human rights community.

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

07.11.2022 - New tightening of legislation on "foreign agents" will affect religious organizations

Sova Center - On November 7, 2022, it became known about changes to the draft law on legislation on "foreign agents" adopted by the State Duma in the first reading. The new changes concern Art. 239 of the Criminal Code (creation of a non-profit organization that infringes on the personality and rights of citizens) and toughen responsibility for it.

The current version provides for under part 1 of this article (the creation of a religious or public association whose activities involve violence against citizens or other harm to their health, as well as the leadership of such an association) punishment in the form of a fine of up to 300 thousand, or restriction of freedom up to four years or forced labor or imprisonment for the same period. The amendments propose punishment in the form of forced labor for up to five years, or imprisonment for up to seven years.

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

07.11.2022 - The owner of the AnderSon cafe chain was complained to the prosecutor's office because of Halloween

Sova Center - In early November 2022, it became known that the journalist and author of the book "The State of Honor. Monarchy is the future of Russia" Anna Palyukh (Shafran) appealed to the prosecutor's office with a request to conduct an inspection under Art. 148 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation (violation of the right to freedom of conscience and religion). The reason for the appeal was the holding of a children's Halloween in the cafe and a master class on cooking monsters.

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

07.11.2022 - The Ministry of Defense confirmed the granting of a deferment to the clergy

Sova center - On October 31, 2022, the Ministry of Defense confirmed the granting of a deferment from military service during the period of mobilization to clergymen and students of theological and theological faculties.

This is stated in the response signed by the head of the department for interaction with religious associations of the Main Military-Political Directorate of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation O. Veselkov to the appeal of the head bishop of the Russian United Union of Christians of the Evangelical Faith (Pentecostals) Sergei Ryakhovsky dated September 29.

[Continue reading...](#)

07.11.2022 -A Court in Rubtsovsk sent Andrey Danielyan, 53, to a Penal Colony for six years for talking about the Bible

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2022/11/071330.html>

On November 7, 2022, the judge of the Rubtsovsk City Court of the Altai Territory, Aleksey Bezrukov, considered reading and discussing the Bible extremism, finding Andrey Danielyan guilty and assigning the believer 6 years of real imprisonment in a penal colony. The believer was taken into custody in the courtroom.

Joint worship of God with other believers was interpreted by the prosecution as illegal activity with criminal intent. Although there is not a single victim in the case, the prosecutor asked the court to sentence Danielyan to 7 years in prison. The verdict has not entered into force and can be appealed. The believer insists on his complete innocence.

[Continue reading...](#)

04.11.2022 - Appeal in Pskov overturned the acquittal verdict against one of Jehovah's Witnesses Aleksey Khabarov

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2022/11/041621.html>

On November 3, 2022, the Court of Appeal in Pskov overturned the acquittal verdict against **Alexey Khabarov** and sent the case for a new trial to a different court of first instance.

The believer was criminally prosecuted under Article 282.2 (2) of the RF Criminal Code because of his religion. The verdict of "not guilty" was handed down by the Porkhovsky District Court of Pskov region on June 27, 2022. The prosecutor's office, which had requested a sentence of 3.5 years in prison, appealed the acquittal verdict to the Pskov Regional Court of Appeal.

[Continue reading...](#)

04.11.2022 - In Belgorod, an inspection is underway in connection with the distribution of a book by ex-governor Savchenko about his new religion

Sova Center - On April 7, 2022, it became known about the check against the speaker of the Belgorod Regional Duma Olga Pavlova, her deputy Valery Sergachev and the leader of the regional branch of United Russia Elena Bondarenko. The reason for the inspection was the distribution of the book of the former governor of the Belgorod region Yevgeny Savchenko "Shock", in which he describes his new religion. Security officials do not rule out the presence of signs of extremism in the book.

[Continue reading...](#)

03.11.2022 - The Constitutional Court refused to define the difference between a religious group and a joint confession of faith

Sova Center - On November 3, 2022, it became known that the Constitutional Court refused to consider the complaint of believers who asked to clarify how the joint confession of faith differs from the creation of a religious group.



Earlier, Baptists from Anapa turned to the Constitutional Court with a request to check whether they comply with Art. Art. 28 and 30 of the Constitution of the Russian Federation, the provisions of the first sentence of paragraph 1 of Art. 7 and the first sentence of paragraph 2 of Art. 7 of the law "On freedom of conscience and religious associations". The Constitutional Court registered the complaint, but refused to accept it for consideration.

[Continue reading...](#)

01.11.2022 - Russian Baptists called for an end to hostilities in Ukraine

Sova Center - The RSECB published an appeal to the presidents of four countries calling for the soonest establishment of peace on the territory of Ukraine and the prevention of the use of nuclear and chemical weapons.

On October 20, 2022, the Russian Union of Evangelical Christian Baptists (RSECB) published an appeal to the presidents of Russia, Ukraine, France and the United States. The appeal was published on behalf of the Baptist World Alliance (BWA), the European Baptist Federation (EBF) and the RSECB itself.

The authors of the document call on the heads of the mentioned states "for a peaceful and just solution to the conflict currently taking place in Ukraine."

[Continue reading...](#)

Silantyev, Amelina: Ukrainian “cults” have killed 500 children in Russia

Propaganda journalist Yana Amelina joined the anti-cult leader in denouncing bloodthirsty Ukraine-controlled Satanists operating in Russian territory.

by Massimo Introvigne



Yana Amelina. Credits.

Bitter Winter (04.11.2022) - <https://bit.ly/3Tqwnqu> - Interfax reported on November 2 that Roman Silantyev, now speaking in his capacity of "head of the Human Rights Center of the World Russian People's Council" (whose President is Patriarch Krill), insisted in a speech of the same day that the war in Ukraine has "a religious character."

Silantyev is one of Russia's most active propagandists against "cults" and, as late as July 2022, has been invited to **events organized in the West** by affiliates of the European anti-cult federation FECRIS. He is famous for his accusations against Satanists, Neo-Pagans, and other "cultists" allegedly inspiring the resistance in Ukraine and infiltrating Russia (where they kill with the same enthusiasm Russian children, **cats, and pigeons**) on behalf of American and Ukrainian intelligence services.

On November 2 he said that he "can confirm that the statements of [Chechnya leader] Ramzan Kadyrov that Russia is at war with Satanists are true. Since 2014, Ukraine has been purposefully killing our citizens, mainly children, through information and psychological operations. This is the spread of 'games of death' in social networks, propaganda of neo-Nazism, the Columbine cultic terrorist movement, and telephone terrorism... Because of this, we lost some 500 children who were persuaded to commit suicide or died in 'school shootings.' [I uncovered the] pseudo-religious, and to put it bluntly, Satanic motivations of criminals, who are being pushed to this by foreign extremist organizations. One of them was created in the Dnepropetrovsk region of Ukraine." Secretly directed by Ukrainian intelligence, these "cults" recruit adepts in Russia who engage in "black magic, terrorist attacks, and the human sacrifice of children."

"Columbine Satanism" is a non-existing "**cult invented by Silantyev**", who borrowed its name from the high school massacre in Columbine, Colorado, in 1999. Silantyev falsely claims that it was the result of a CIA experiment carried out in cooperation with Anton LaVey's Church of Satan, aimed at creating an international "**cult**" of armed terrorists entering schools and randomly shooting at students and teachers. More recently, Silantyev named the Ukrainian intelligence as a co-conspirator, and claimed that "Columbine Satanism" was mostly created to organize school shootings in Russia.

The same American and Ukrainian intelligence services, Silantyev insists, also propagate games openly or covertly promoting suicide in Russia through social networks, and “telephone terrorism,” which consists in calling Russian schools with bomb threats to destabilize the mental health of the students.

Silantyev relies on the books by Yana Amelina. She is a controversial journalist embedded with Russian troops in several wars, and a staunch propagandist of the regime. She became famous, and received awards, for claiming that **divine intervention** had protected Russian troops during the war against Georgia in 2009 in South Ossetia. The then President of the pseudo-republic of South Ossetia, Leonid Tibilov, **awarded her with the State Order of Friendship** in 2013.



Amelina awarded the State Order of Friendship of South Ossetia in 2013. From Telegram.

In fact, Amelina and Silantyev continuously quote and legitimize each other. Amelina **also claims** that “Columbine Satanism” exists and “is almost completely organized and controlled from Ukrainian territory.” Silantyev **also invented** another non-existing “cult” called MKU (Maniacs: Killer **Cult**), which he believes is also controlled by the Ukrainian intelligence—this is the “**cult** headquartered in the Dnepropetrovsk region” he often refers to.

Amelina does not deny that MKU exists, but adds yet another Satanist “**cult**” that allegedly operates under “the control of the Security Service of Ukraine,” called RAMP (Russian Amoral Murder Portrait). There is a **division of labour** between MKU and RAMP, Amelina explains. RAMP tries to “distract Russian authorities and security officials” through Internet propaganda and “telephone terrorism” while MKU prepares “terrorist attacks” and sabotage of Russian infrastructures “in the interest of the Ukrainian state.” Unnecessary to say, there is no evidence that RAMP exists either.

Amelina’s theories have been promoted by the website (owned by the Russian Orthodox Church) operated by Archpriest Alexander Novopashin, the Vice President of Russian umbrella anti-**cult** organization RATsIRS, which Novopashin still claims **is affiliated with FECRIS**.

In an article republished by Novopashin's website, Amelina argues that she knew about the different Satanist cults operated by the Ukrainian intelligence "long before the special operation," but was "told that this would be considered Russian propaganda" internationally, and it was better to keep quiet about these organizations. However, when the "special military operation" started "on February 24, 2022, everything became clear, the masks were dropped," and Amelina was allowed to write that Ukraine was behind RAMP, MKU, and Columbine Satanism.



Amelina at a conference. From Telegram.

Silantyev and Amelina's theories are not just the ramblings of isolated psychopaths. The FSB has arrested hundreds of Russian citizens accused of being part of the fictional MKU and Columbine Satanist organizations, including supporters of Alexei Navalny and other opponents of the Putin regime (characterizing Putin's government as a regime and spreading criticism of the "special military operation" in Russia is also a main task of the Ukrainian Satanists, according to Amelina).

In the article republished by Novopashin, Amelina argues nostalgically that the problem of Satanist "maniacs" had been solved by the Soviet Union. "Why in Soviet times we did not have armed attacks, and the number of maniacs was small? There was a harsh and just law. For such crimes, people were sentenced to capital punishment and executed. Several maniacs of the Soviet era, which everyone knows about, were found and punished strictly according to the law. They were gone. No society managed to completely eradicate crime, the USSR was no exception either, but they tried, and quite successfully, to keep it under control... In the USSR there was a strong ideology that outlawed such things and offered an image of the future that suited everyone, with rare exceptions. There was no need to become a maniac: study, work, create a family, give birth to children, live happily for the sake of your well-being and your country," Amelina said.

Seven Jehovah's Witnesses sentenced to six years in prison in October

40 Jehovah's Witnesses have been sentenced to heavy prison terms since 1 January

By Willy Fautré

The European Times (02.11.2022) - <https://bit.ly/3DvJINt> - The persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses is going on unabated. In the last 10 months, 40 of them have been sentenced for merely practicing their religion in private and put behind bars.

Here is the list of the last seven Jehovah's Witnesses sentenced in October 2022 and serving heavy prison terms:

On 25 October in the Amur Region:

Vladimir Bukin, 50 years (6 years and 6 months)

Mikhail Ivanovich Burkov, 39 years (6 years and 2 months)

Valeriy Slashchev, 41 years (6 years and 6 months)

Sergey Vitaliyevich Yuferov, 47 years (6 years and 6 months)

On 6 October in Sevastopol (Crimea):

Vladimir Ivanovich Maladyka, 59 years (6 years)

Vladimir Fedorovich Sakada, 52 years (6 years)

Yevgeniy Sergeyevich Zhukov, 53 years (6 years)

Four Jehovah's Witnesses sentenced to 6 years in prison in the amur Region



In the photo: Sergey Yuferov, Mikhail Burkov, Vladimir Bukin and Valery Slashchev near the Tyndinsky District Court of the Amur Region. September, 2022. Credit: Jehovah's Witnesses

On October 25, 2022, Ivan Kuznetsov, judge of the Tyndinskiy District Court of the Amur Region, sentenced four of Jehovah's Witnesses from the city of Tynda to imprisonment in a penal colony. Vladimir Bukin, Valeriy Slashchev and Sergey Yuferov were given 6 years and 6 months each, and Mikhail Burkov — 6 years and 2 months.

The believers were taken into custody in the courtroom. They can appeal the verdict to a higher court.

On November 11, 2019, FSB investigator V.S. Obukhov opened a criminal case against four residents of Tynda for their faith. A week later, searches and interrogations took place in their families, during which the men were persistently persuaded to cooperate with the investigation. The believers were accused of organizing the activities of an extremist organization (Part 1 of Article 282.2 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation) for holding worship services and "home-based Bible studies." Also, the investigation considered the conversations of Bukin, Yuferov and Slashchev about the Bible with informant D. Nurakov, who in 2018 began collecting information about local believers, as an involvement in extremist activity (part 1.1 of article 282.2 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation).

The investigation lasted for a year and a half. On June 28, 2021, the case (consisting of at least 15 volumes) went to court. As "evidence of illegal activity" of the defendants, the prosecutor presented texts from seized postcards and printouts on the topics "Good manners are an integral feature of God's people", "What kind of treatment God expects for the elderly" and "Love strengthens". Although during the hearings no specific facts of extremist actions on the part of the defendants were provided, the prosecutor asked to assign them long prison terms: for Vladimir Bukin — 8 years and 6 months, for Sergey Yuferov and Valeriy Slashchev — 8 years and 4 months each and for Mikhail Burkov — 6 years and 6 months of imprisonment in a penal colony.

Addressing the court with the last plea, the believers stressed that they consider themselves innocent. "Our only 'guilt' is that we want to glorify God and keep his commandments," Vladimir Bukin said. "Therefore, if I am found guilty, it is guilty of loving God, his holy name and his word, the Bible." And Mikhail Burkov noted: "I am being judged because I am learning to show positive qualities: kindness, peacefulness, compassion, patience, respect ... A reference from the place of employment and two letters of gratitude

from the mayor of the city of Tynda confirm that I am a hardworking, sympathetic and peaceful citizen ready for any good work."

In the Amur Region, [23 Jehovah's Witnesses](#) suffered for their faith. [Aleksey Berchuk](#) and [Dmitriy Golik](#) are serving long terms in a colony, while [Konstantin Moiseyenko](#) and [Vasiliy Reznichenko](#) received a suspended sentence. Another seven men are defending their right to profess the religion of Jehovah's Witnesses in court. Most of the cases against believers in this region were initiated by FSB investigator Obukhov.

Three Jehovah's Witnesses sentenced to 6 years in prison in Crimea



Sakada Vladimir, Zhukov Evgeny and Maladyka Vladimir at the courthouse before the announcement of the verdict (October 6, 2022). Credit: Jehovah's Witnesses

On October 6, 2022, judge Olga Berdnikova of the Nakhimovsky District Court of Sevastopol found three Jehovah's Witnesses guilty of extremism.

They were prosecuted under Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 1 – Six to 10 years' imprisonment, plus a compulsory ban on holding certain positions and/or carrying out certain activities for up to 10 years and compulsory restrictions on freedom for one to two years after release; or a 400,000 to 800,000 Rouble fine.

Yevgeny Zhukov, Vladimir Maladyka and Vladimir Sakada received 6 years in prison each. This sentence is to be served in a correctional colony of general regime, with deprivation of the right to engage in educational activities, activities related to speeches and publications in the media, posting materials in information and telecommunication networks, including the Internet for a period for 7 years, with restriction of liberty for a period of 1 year

The believers were immediately taken into custody. They intend to appeal the verdict.

Right from the courtroom, Zhukov, Maladyka and Sakada were taken to SIZO No. 1 in the city of Simferopol.

Zhukov, Maladyka and Sakada faced persecution for their faith on October 1, 2020, at the height of the coronavirus pandemic. For the fact that believers participated in peaceful religious meetings, a criminal case was initiated against them. They, as well as their co-religionists from Sevastopol, were searched. On the same day, four believers, including



Zhukov, Maladyka and Sakada, were sent to a pre-trial detention center, where they spent 6 to 7.5 months. In addition, Vladimir Maladyka and his wife were subjected to compulsory examination in a psycho-neurological dispensary because of a bag of powdered milk found at their home, which seemed suspicious to the investigators.

Vladimir Sakada and Vladimir Maladyka have families, Evgeny Zhukov takes care of his disabled brother. All three believers have a reputation as respectable people and law-abiding citizens.

The investigation was conducted by the FSB of Russia for the Republic of Crimea and Sevastopol for about six months. In April 2021, the case went to court. As "evidence" of the believers' guilt, the investigation used hidden video recordings of worship services made by FSB agents. In the video, believers pray, sing and discuss the Bible. During the court hearings, Vladimir Sakada stated that the videotapes presented to the experts and the court "were subjected to unauthorized changes." However, the court refused to verify this material evidence. FSB officer Dmitry Shevchenko, who conducted operational-search activities, said in court that there were no signs of extremism and facts of inciting religious hatred in the actions of the defendants. According to him, he has been familiar with the activities of Jehovah's Witnesses in Sevastopol since 2015, and their services have always been of an exclusively religious nature.

However, the court returned a guilty verdict.

In Crimea, a total of [16 Jehovah's Witnesses](#) have faced persecution for their faith, four of them are serving sentences in a penal colony. In June 2022, the European Court of Human Rights [declared](#) the persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia unlawful, and all charges against them unfounded.

Special Bimonthly FORB Digest (16–31.10.2022)

27.10.2022 - The Court of Cassation dismissed Jehovah's Witness Andrey Gubin's complaint against the verdict of the Birobidzhan District Court

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2022/10/271133.html>

On October 25, 2022, the Ninth Court of Cassation of General Jurisdiction in Vladivostok considered Andrey Gubin's cassation appeal against the verdict and the appeal ruling , according to which he was sentenced to imprisonment for a term of 2 years and 6 months suspended for his religion.

The believer considers himself innocent and unjustly condemned. At one time, the local religious organization of Jehovah's Witnesses in the city of Birobidzhan was liquidated by the decision of the Court of the Jewish Autonomous Region. In the ruling on appeal in this case, the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation indicated that "the participants in this local organization are not deprived of the possibility of independent worship." Gubin believes that he used this right. He tried to draw the attention of the Court of Cassation to this and many other rehabilitating circumstances of the case, but the verdict was not overturned.

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26.10.2022 - Korelov insists: Jehovah's Witnesses and other "cults" ready to overthrow the Putin regime

The great conspiracy of the Russian Jehovah's Witnesses, Act II. We reported in Bitter Winter that the lawyer of the Russian anti-cult federation RATsIRS, Alexander Korelov, had claimed that the Jehovah's Witnesses were preparing a coup to overthrow the Putin regime, on behalf of the CIA and the Ukrainian intelligence, and with the help of Scientologists and Pentecostals.

Our readers might have considered the article as a curiosity, although Korelov is a famous lawyer in Russia, and one who has even spoken at the Belgian Parliament invited by MP André Frédéric, the current president of the European anti-cult federation FECRIS sharing the podium with Anne Josso, the general secretary of the French anti-cult mission MIVILUDES. Somebody might have thought that Korelov's conspiracy theories would be regarded as extreme even by the Russian Orthodox Church, which published them in one of its local websites, and would be quickly forgotten.

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25.10.2022 - Jehovah's Witnesses from Tynda sentenced to real terms

Sova Center - Four Jehovah's Witnesses received sentences ranging from six to six and a half years.

On October 25, 2022, the Tyndinsky District Court of the Amur Region passed a sentence on four Jehovah's Witnesses. Vladimir Bukin, Valery Slashchev and Sergey Yuferov were found guilty on CC. 1 and 1.1 Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code (organization of the activities of an extremist organization, involvement in it) and were sentenced to six and a half years in prison in a general regime colony each. Mikhail Burkov, who was accused only under Part 1 of Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code, received six years and two months in prison. The defendants were taken into custody in the courtroom.

[Continue reading...](#)

24.10.2022 - Russian anti-cult leader: "International religious liberty is a Nazi idea"

Bitter Winter - Almost every day, a new argument is advanced by the Russian anti-cult organizations to support the aggression against Ukraine and slander the Ukrainian government, the United States, and the West in general. Readers of Bitter Winter should by now be familiar with Archpriest Alexander Novopashin, the deputy of famous Russian anti-cultist Alexander Dvorkin as leader of the national anti-cult umbrella organization Russian Association of Centers for Religious and Cultic Studies (РАЦИРС/RATsIRS), which is connected with the European anti-cult federation FECRIS (despite unconfirmed theories that RATsIRS has been expelled from FECRIS, Novopashin's website still mentions it is FECRIS' Russian affiliate).

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24.10.2022 - The court in Krasnoyarsk liquidated the Church of the last testament

On October 24, 2022, the Krasnoyarsk Regional Court granted the claim of the regional prosecutor's office to liquidate the local religious organization "Church of the Last Testament".

The prosecutor's office, followed by the court, considered that the organization "threatens the interests of society and the state, infringes on the personality, rights and freedoms of citizens, entails damage to the morality and health of citizens" .

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21.10.2022 - One of Jehovah's Witnesses, 67, detained in Maykop

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2022/10/211652.html>

On 20 October 2022 searches were again carried out in Maykop at least three addresses of Jehovah's Witnesses. Nikolay Voishchev, 67, was arrested and a criminal case was opened against him.

Early in the morning employees of the Investigative Committee and FSB, witnesses and IT-specialist came to the believers with a search. They seized cell phones, electronic devices, and hard drives with personal photos and documents. The law enforcers behaved correctly. Three believers were taken to the investigative committee of Maikop for questioning, after which two were released and Nikolai Voishchev was placed in temporary detention isolation ward. Soon, the court will choose a measure of restraint for him.

[Continue reading...](#)

21.10.2022 - The Court of Cassation upheld the conviction of Sergey Sergeyev and Yuriy Belosludtsev - Six years of suspended sentence for believing in God

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2022/10/211620.html>

On 18 October 2022 the Ninth Court of Cassation of General Jurisdiction in Vladivostok considered the appeal of Sergey Sergeyev and Yuriy Belosludtsev against their sentence. The judicial board disregarded their right to freedom of religion and upheld the decision of the first instance.

Addressing the court of cassation, Yuriy Belosludtsev said: "I am an ordinary believer, and my actions, which were regarded as criminal by the court of first instance, are reading the Bible, singing songs, praying, and also talking on biblical topics. But these cases are ordinary cases for any believer, and they are protected by Article 28 of the Constitution of the Russian Federation".

[Continue reading...](#)

18.10.2022 - A new criminal case has been initiated in Kamchatka on the activities of Jehovah's Witnesses

October 17, 2022 in Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky, as part of a new criminal case initiated under Part 1 of Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code (organization of the activities of an extremist organization), searches were carried out at the homes of Jehovah's Witnesses. The case was opened on 25 September. Investigators searched four apartments of local residents, as well as one car. After searches and interrogations, the Jehovah's Witnesses were released on a promise to appear.

Jehovah's Witnesses are accused of involvement in the activities of an extremist organization due to the fact that in April 2017 the Supreme Court of Russia ruled that the Administrative Center of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia and 395 local religious organizations were extremist. We believe that this decision, which entailed the mass persecution of believers under Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code, had no legal grounds, and we regard it as a manifestation of religious discrimination. In June 2022, the

ECtHR ruled on the complaint of Jehovah's Witnesses, in which he acknowledged that the ban on their materials and organizations and the persecution of believers are contrary to the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, and demanded that criminal cases be dropped under Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code against Jehovah's Witnesses and release imprisoned believers.

21.10.2022 - The appeal in Krasnodar affirmed the verdict for the faith of Aleksandr Nikolaev, a many-child father

Link to full text in Russian : <https://jw-russia.org/news/2022/10/211608.html>

On October 20, 2022, the Krasnodar Territory Court dismissed an appeal of 49-year-old Aleksandr Nikolaev from the village of Kholmskaya. The father of five children will have to spend another 11 months in a penal colony for participating in an online worship service where he read aloud a passage from the Bible.

The sentence came into effect. The believer still insists on his innocence and has the right to file a complaint with the court of cassation. He has already spent almost 13 months in the detention center, which is added to his sentence on the basis of the principle one day for one and a half. The presumed date of release from the colony - September 19, 2023, but after release, Aleksandr Nikolaev must regularly report to the inspection of the Federal Penitentiary Service for six months at his place of residence. This part of the sentence was added by the appellate court.

[Continue reading...](#)

21.10.2022 - In Primorye, Galina Kobeleva, 66, received a six-year suspended sentence for practicing the religion of Jehovah's Witnesses

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2022/10/210939.html>

On October 20, 2022, the judge of the Lesozavodskiy District Court of the Primorye Territory Sergey Galayuda found Galina Kobeleva guilty of organizing the activities of an extremist organization only because of her religion and sentenced her to 6 years suspended sentence—this is exactly the punishment requested by the prosecutor.

In court, the believer said, "I still insist that I did not commit any crime. My religious activity was not a continuation of the activities of a liquidated legal entity, but a way of confessing my faith." The verdict has not entered into force and can be appealed.

[Continue reading...](#)

18.10.2022 - First criminal conviction for opposing war in Ukraine on religious grounds

Forum 18 - A Russian Orthodox priest from the Urals has become the first person to receive a criminal conviction for opposing Russia's war in Ukraine on religious grounds. A court in Sverdlovsk Region fined Fr Nikandr Pinchuk about two months' average local wage on 17 October for allegedly "discrediting" the Russian Armed Forces for a second time. He was punished for a social media post of under 140 words in length, which condemned the "horde of the Antichrist" attacking Ukraine.

[Continue reading...](#)

17.10.2022 - Judicial statistics on cases of "illegal" missionary work in the first half of 2022 have been published

Sova Center - On October 14, 2022, the Judicial Department of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation published statistical data on the application of Art. 5.26 of the Code of Administrative Offenses of the Russian Federation in the first half of 2022. The number of cases is about the same, the amount of fines has increased.

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РОССИЙСКИЙ УГОЛОК ФЕЙКОВЫХ НОВОСТЕЙ: «Свидетели Иеговы готовят антипутинский переворот», - говорит российский адвокат Александр Корелов

**Связанный с FECRIS адвокат по борьбе с сектами Александр Корелов
утверждает, что у него есть все доказательства: Россия отреагирует и
“уничтожит Соединенные Штаты - духовную помойку человечества”.**

See English version [HERE](#)

Как часто Федеральный парламент Бельгии будет проводить конференции, стигматизирующие религиозные меньшинства?

HRWF (18.10.2022) - 19 мая 2017 года [Александр Корелов](#), адвокат нескольких известных радикальных православных пропагандистов, враждебно настроенных к Свидетелям Иеговы и другим религиозным меньшинствам в России, вместе с Александром Дворкиным, были приглашены FECRIS (Европейской федерацией центров исследований и информации по сектанству) в бельгийский парламент на скандальную конференцию под председательством бельгийского депутата Андре Фредерика.

Бельгийский политик является президентом AVISO, известной как антикультовая ассоциация в Бельгии, связанная с FECRIS. В 2021 году он был назначен президентом FECRIS после того, как в течение нескольких лет был членом ее правления, как и Александр Дворкин, который в течение нескольких лет был вице-президентом FECRIS и известен как экстремистский православный пропагандист - охотник за культурами. Этот бельгиец представлялся очень полезным для FECRIS, поскольку мог предоставить им доступ к помещениям Федерального парламента Бельгии для проведения конференций и тем самым создать определенную ауру и кажущуюся, но ложную, легитимность.

14 июня 2022 года Андре Фредерик провел очередную конференцию FECRIS, будучи ее президентом, в помещении Федерального парламента Бельгии. И он опубликовал статью в ведущей франкоязычной газете [Le Soir](#), в которой говорится об их борьбе за помочь жертвам культов. Жертвы любого рода преступников всегда заслуживают помощи, но в случае FECRIS за так называемой помощью скрывается идеологическая антикультовая программа. В действительности FECRIS, ее филиалы и другие антикультурные группы неоднократно клеймили и клеветали на ряд верований или



религиозных групп, которые им не нравятся или членами которых они ранее являлись, [но они проиграли довольно много дел в различных судах – область исследована HRWF специально.](#)

Итак, как долго федеральный парламент Бельгии будет продолжать терпимо относиться к конференциям, стигматизирующим религиозные меньшинства?

Александр Корелов утверждает, что у него есть доказательства того, что Свидетели Иеговы готовят переворот против президента Путина, сообщает Bitter Winter в экстренной новости, опубликованной 17 октября. Однако, стоит напомнить, что Свидетели Иеговы аполитичны, отказываются от военной службы по соображениям совести и выступают против насилия.

В настоящее время в России **100 Свидетелей Иеговы** (95 мужчин и 5 женщин) заключены в тюрьму за мирное исповедание своей религии. Это самый высокий показатель с момента принятия Верховным судом РФ в 2017 году решения, которое фактически запретило деятельность Свидетелей Иеговы.

100-м Свидетелем, заключенным в тюрьму в России, стал 44-летний Дмитрий Должиков. Он был арестован в сентябре после того, как российские полицейские провели рейд в 13 домах Свидетелей Иеговы в Челябинске. ([ссылка](#)) Дмитрий был впоследствии переведен в следственный изолятор в Новосибирской области, более чем в 900 милях от своего дома.

52-летний **Сергей Климов** находится в заключении дольше всех - с июня 2018 года ([ссылка](#)). Еще **249 Свидетелей Иеговы побывали в тюрьмах и следственных изоляторах**, некоторые из них провели за решеткой более пяти лет. Россия продолжает преследовать Свидетелей Иеговы, в том числе избивать и пытать верующих, несмотря на решение Европейского суда по правам человека от 2022 года, признавшего российский запрет необоснованным и незаконным ([ссылка](#))

Масштабы репрессий против Свидетелей Иеговы в России и Крыму:

- **303** уголовных дела в отношении **643** верующих в **71** регионе.
- **100** в тюрьме
- **18** под домашним арестом
- **1 789** обысков в домах Свидетелей Иеговы после решения Верховного суда РФ в 2017 году, ликвидировавшего юридические лица Свидетелей в России и Крыму.

В Украине и в украинском Крыму до его аннексии в 2014 году ни один Свидетель Иеговы никогда не был заключен в тюрьму за исповедание своей религии. На чьей стороне антикультисты?

Сенсационное разоблачение: Свидетели Иеговы готовят антипутинский переворот

Массимо Интровинье (*)

Bitter Winter (17.10.2022) - <https://bit.ly/3exE6ER> - 13 октября в ходе конференции "Религия, война и мир" в Доме наук о человеке Университета Бордо-Монтень Розита Шорыте рассказала о "сенсационном откровении" о готовящемся в России перевороте против режима Путина.



Розита Шорыте обсуждает откровения Корелова на конференции в Бордо.

В России откровение [было запущено](#) 11 октября на сайте [protoиерея Александра Новопашина](#), вице-президента общероссийской антикультовой зонтичной организации "Российская ассоциация центров изучения религий и сект" (РАЦИРС), связанной с европейской антикультурной федерацией FECRIS. Графическое представление статьи, включая откровение, напоминает традиционную российскую антисемитскую иконографию.

Заявление было сделано известным российским адвокатом Александром Кореловым, который регулярно помогает ведущим антикультистам или представляет их интересы. К примеру, таким как [Александр Дворкин](#) или тот же [Новопашин](#), когда их обвиняют в клевете группы, которые они клеймят как "культы". Корелов представляет себя как ["адвокат РАЦИРС"](#). В 2017 году генеральный секретарь MIVILUDES, французской правительственной антикультурной миссии, Анн Жоссо вместе с Дворкиным и Кореловым [выступила в Брюсселе на конференции](#), организованной FECRIS в бельгийском парламенте. По сей день [выступление Корелова](#) размещено на официальном сайте FECRIS.

Корелов утверждает, что после "ликвидации" и запрета в России в 2017 году "экстремистская secta "Свидетели Иеговы" не прекратила свою деятельность. Как мы и предполагали, они ушли в подполье, проводя свои собрания на конспиративных квартирах, получая инструкции из американского центра через мессенджеры, блоги и так далее. Но в последнее время картина изменилась. Из ведущих центров, расположенных в США, по "закрытым" каналам в нелегальные подразделения секты в нашей стране поступают инструкции, которые свидетельствуют о попытке секты организовать в России государственный переворот по типу Майдана на бывшей Украине".

Не обходя стороной употребление выражения "бывшая Украина", можно заострить внимание на тезисе Корелова о том, что "в России западные спецслужбы намерены повторить уже разработанную схему, реализованную в Киеве в 2014 году. Суть ее заключается в следующем. Для начала на улицы выводятся "мирные протестующие", костяк которых составляют в первую очередь адепты культов", среди которых юрист упоминает также пятидесятников и сайентологов. Затем к ним "подтягиваются

всевозможные недовольные элементы, психически больные, наркоманы, преступники и просто любопытные люди". Все начинается вроде бы мирно, под пацифистскими лозунгами. Постепенно толпа начинает "разогреваться" с помощью специально обученных провокаторов, а также в социальных сетей." И, наконец, правительство идет на попятную: "Согласно имеющейся в нашем распоряжении информации, это именно то, что интенсивно готовится в среде культов. Сейчас у нас есть абсолютно определенные данные, что Свидетели Иеговы превращаются из экстремистской организации в террористическую. Мы предупреждали об этом еще несколько лет назад".

Возможно, упуская из виду тот факт, что Свидетели Иеговы в 2016-2017 годах перенесли свою штаб-квартиру из Бруклина в Уорик, Корелов настаивает, что "лидеры из бруклинского центра превращают российских адептов в пушечное мясо для достижения своих целей. Как на Украине США воюют руками украинцев и наемников, так и в России они готовы тратить ненужный им биоматериал в виде адептов этого культа. Американское руководство "Свидетелей Иеговы" состоит из людей, не обремененных моральными нормами. Они готовы на все. В то же время начинается идеологическая поддержка среди спонсируемых американцами религиоведов, которые уже заговорили о необходимости "реабилитации" Свидетелей Иеговы".

Свидетелей Иеговы обвиняют в функционировании "спящих" экстремистских ячеек с руководящим центром в США. И то, что бруклинский [снова] центр этого культа находится под полным контролем американских спецслужб, уже ни для кого не секрет". Пятидесятники, сайентологи и даже "неоязычники" также готовятся американской разведкой для поддержки переворота "Свидетелей Иеговы", по крайней мере, так считает Корелов.

Все эти "культы" описываются как "просто марионеточные организации в руках закулисного кукловода". Это элемент социально-политической структуры США, который они пытаются навязать всему миру. Очевидно также, что все американские культы управляются из единого центра", - утверждение, которое также недавно [выдвинул Новопашин](#).

"Культы" и сами Соединенные Штаты изображаются адвокатом как "нечто гнусное, недостойное. Обратите внимание на глупость их лидеров. Тот же Хаббард - основатель сайентологии - был дегенеративной личностью. А лжепророчества адвентистов? Это явно попахивает психическим расстройством. Поэтому при упоминании американских культов можно покрутить пальцем у виска.

Соединенные Штаты - это духовная помойка человечества. Я никогда не воспринимал всерьез их общественно-государственную матрицу. В их стране нет людей, способных мыслить глобально, нет собственных знаний, все куплено. Примитив, одним словом. [...] У США очень уязвимая общественно-политическая система, которую можно разрушить за несколько месяцев. Нужно только знать их уязвимые места и уметь влиять на них". Россия не стала уничтожать Соединенные Штаты сразу, объясняет Корелов, "потому что слишком резкие перемены означают гибель сотен миллионов людей от войн и потрясений во всех странах. Я сомневаюсь, что кто-то готов взять на себя ответственность за такие жертвы. Все должно быть поступательно и тщательно продумано. Это и есть искусство политики".

Однако адвокат считает, что события на Украине, а теперь и подготовка антипутинского переворота через Свидетелей Иеговы являются началом конца для США, так как Россия не могла не отреагировать. "Россия не находится в состоянии войны с Украиной. Россия, на самом деле, воюет с сатанистами Запада ЗА Украину и украинский народ, чтобы спасти людей, защитить их от произвола США и других псевдodemократических государств". В Украине, утверждает он, "есть бактериологические лаборатории США, которые распространяют инфекции по всему

миру, есть тайные концентрационные лагеря, где пытают и убивают украинцев, организуют торговлю украинскими детьми и многое другое. Я видел, как технологии промывания мозгов культурами превращают жителей бывшей советской республики в зомби. [...] Некогда процветающая советская республика Украина была превращена американскими оккупантами в нацистский ад. Я могу с абсолютной уверенностью сказать, что Соединенные Штаты осуществляют геноцид населения Украины. Они методично отправляют украинцев на смерть под предлогом противостояния с Россией, они расстреливают и вешают, или развращают украинских детей в городах и селах. Страшно смотреть, когда наши войска входят в села, а там десятки повешенных детей" - повешенных "США и НАТО".

Можно считать эти абсурдные заявления бредом сумасшедшего. Однако, Корелов действительно известный в России адвокат, а сайт, на котором опубликованы его откровения, является официальным как главной российской антикультурной организации, так и Русской православной церкви. Он даже [выступал в Бельгийском парламенте](#) вместе с элитой западных антикультурных и генеральным секретарем французского правительенного агентства. Обвинение миролюбивых и аполитичных Свидетелей Иеговы в терроризме и подготовке переворота, конечно, нелепо. Однако, подобные "разоблачения" служат основанием для дальнейших преследований Свидетелей Иеговы и последователей других групп, заклейменных как "культы".

"Я знаю, что Россия, страна верующих и традиционных ценностей, имеет гораздо больший потенциал развития, чем весь "коллективный Запад" вместе взятый", - заключает Корелов. Кроме того, - "Бог с нами. Мы победим".

(*) Массимо Интровинье (родился 14 июня 1955 года в Риме) - итальянский социолог религий. Он является основателем и управляющим директором Центра изучения новых религий ([CESNUR](#)), международной сети ученых, изучающих новые религиозные движения. Интровинье является автором около 70 книг и более 100 статей в области социологии религии. Он был основным автором [Enciclopedia delle religioni in Italia](#) (Энциклопедии религий в Италии). Он является членом редакционной коллегии [Междисциплинарного журнала исследований религии](#) и исполнительного совета [Nova Religio](#) издательства Калифорнийского университета. С 5 января по 31 декабря 2011 года он занимал должность "Представителя по борьбе с расизмом, ксенофобией и дискриминацией, с особым акцентом на дискриминацию христиан и представителей других религий" [Организации по безопасности и сотрудничеству в Европе \(ОБСЕ\)](#). С 2012 по 2015 год он был председателем Обсерватории религиозной свободы, созданной Министерством иностранных дел Италии для мониторинга проблем религиозной свободы в мировом масштабе.

RUSSIAN FAKE NEWS CORNER: Jehovah's Witnesses prepare an anti-Putin coup, says Russian lawyer Alexander Korelov

FECRIS-connected anti-cult lawyer Alexander Korelov claims he has all the evidence: Russia will react and "destroy the United States, the spiritual garbage dump of humanity."

How often will the Belgian Federal Parliament go on hosting conferences stigmatizing minority belief communities?

HRWF (18.10.2022) - On 19 May 2017, [Alexander Korelov](#), the lawyer of several well-known radical Russian Orthodox propagandists hostile to Jehovah's Witnesses and other religious minorities in Russia, such as Alexander Dvorkin, was invited by FECRIS (European Federation of Research and Information Centres on Cults and Sects) at the Belgian Parliament to a controversial conference chaired by Belgian MP André Frédéric.

The Belgian politician is the president of AVISO, identified as an anti-cult association in Belgium affiliated to FECRIS. In 2021, he was appointed president of FECRIS after being a member of their board for several years, along with Alexander Dvorkin, former vice-president of FECRIS for several years and known as an extremist Orthodox propagandist and cult-hunter. This Belgian personality is very useful for FECRIS as he can give them access to the premises of the Belgian Federal Parliament for their conferences and hereby enjoy a certain aura and apparent but false legitimacy.

On 14 June 2022, André Frédéric hosted another FECRIS conference, as its president, in the premises of the Belgian Federal Parliament. And he published an article in a leading francophone newspaper [Le Soir](#) referring to their fight for assistance to victims of cults. Victims of any sort of perpetrators always deserve to be helped but in the case of FECRIS, the so-called assistance hides an ideological anti-cult agenda. In reality, FECRIS, its affiliates and other anti-cult groups repeatedly stigmatize and libel a number of belief or religious groups they do not like or they were formerly members of but [they have lost quite a number of cases in various courts, an area that HRWF has specifically investigated.](#)

So, how long will the Belgian Federal Parliament go on tolerating conferences stigmatizing minority belief communities?

Alexander Korelov claims to have evidence that Jehovah's Witnesses prepare a coup against President Putin, says Bitter Winter in a breaking news published on 17 October. Though, it is worth reminding that Jehovah's Witnesses are apolitical, conscientious objectors to military service and opposed to violence.

Russia has now imprisoned **100 Jehovah's Witnesses** (95 men and 5 women) for the peaceful practice of their religion. This is the highest since the 2017 Russian Supreme Court ruling that effectively banned the Witnesses' activities.

The 100th Witness to be imprisoned in Russia is Dmitriy Dolzhikov, 44. He was arrested in September after Russian officers raided 13 homes of Jehovah's Witnesses in Chelyabinsk. (see [link](#) to report) Dmitriy was subsequently transferred to a pretrial detention center in Novosibirsk Region, over 900 miles away from his home.



Sergey Klimov, 52, has been in prison the longest—since June 2018. ([link](#)) Another **249 of Jehovah's Witnesses have been to prisons and pretrial detention centers**, some of whom have spent more than five years behind bars. Russia has persisted in persecuting Jehovah's Witnesses, which has included beating and torturing believers, despite the European Court of Human Rights' 2022 judgement by that declared Russia's ban unjustified and illegal. ([link](#))

Scope of the repression of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia and Crimea:

- **303** criminal cases, involving **643** believers, across **71** regions
- **100** in prison
- **18** under house arrest
- **1,789** homes of Witnesses raided since the 2017 Russian Supreme Court ruling that liquidated the Witnesses' legal entities in Russia and Crimea

In Ukraine and in Ukrainian Crimea, until its annexation in 2014, no Jehovah's Witness was ever imprisoned for the practice of his/her religion. On which side are the anti-cultists?

Sensational revelations: Jehovah's Witnesses prepare an anti-Putin coup

by Massimo Introvigne (*)

Bitter Winter (17.10.2022) - <https://bit.ly/3exE6ER> - On October 13, during the conference "Religion, War and Peace" at the University of Bordeaux-Montaigne's Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, Rosita Šorytė discussed a "sensational revelation" about a coup against the Putin regime that is reportedly under preparation in Russia.



Rosita Šorytė discussing Korelov's revelations at the Bordeaux conference.

The revelation [was launched in Russia](#) on October 11 by the website of [Archpriest Alexander Novopashin](#), the Vice President of the Russian national anti-cult umbrella organization Russian Association of Centers for Religious and Cultic Studies

(РАЦИРС/RATsIRS), which is connected with the European anti-cult federation FECRIS. The graphic presentation of the article including the revelation is reminiscent of traditional Russian anti-Semitic iconography.

The statement is by a well-known Russian lawyer, Alexander Korelov, which regularly helps or represents leading anti-cultists such as [Alexander Dvorkin](#) or [the same Novopashin](#) when they are accused of defamation by groups they stigmatize as "cults." Korelov introduces himself as "[lawyer of RATsIRS](#)." In 2017, the Secretary General of the MIVILUDES, the French governmental anti-cult mission, Anne Josso, [shared the stage in Brussels](#) with both Dvorkin and Korelov at a conference organized at the Belgian Parliament by the FECRIS. To this very day, [a text by Korelov](#) appears on FECRIS' official website.

Korelov claims that after it was "liquidated" and banned in Russia in 2017, "the extremist cult of the Jehovah's Witnesses did not cease to operate. As we expected, they went underground, holding their meetings in safe houses, receiving instructions from the American center through instant messengers, blogs, and so on. But lately the picture has changed. From the leading centers located in the United States, instructions are sent to the illegal divisions of the cult in our country through 'closed' channels, which indicate an attempt by the cult to organize a coup d'état in Russia similar to the Maidan in the now former Ukraine."

Not without noting the use of the expression "former Ukraine," we can focus our attention on Korelov's thesis that "in Russia, the Western intelligence services intend to repeat the already developed scheme, implemented in Kyiv in 2014. Its essence is this. To begin with, 'peaceful protesters' are being taken out onto the streets, the backbone of which is primarily adherents of cults," among which the lawyer mentions also Pentecostals and Scientologists. Then, "all kinds of dissatisfied elements, the mentally ill, drug addicts, criminals and just curious people are drawn to them. Everything seems to start peacefully, under pacifist slogans. Gradually, the crowd begins to 'warm up' with specially trained provocateurs, as well as on social networks." And finally, the government is reversed: "According to the information at our disposal, this is precisely what is being intensively prepared in the milieu of cults. Now we have absolutely certain data that Jehovah's Witnesses are turning from an extremist organization into a terrorist one. We warned about this already several years ago."

Perhaps overlooking the fact that the Jehovah's Witnesses moved their headquarters from Brooklyn to Warwick in 2016–2017, Korelov insists that "the leaders from the Brooklyn center are turning Russian adherents into cannon fodder to achieve their goals. Just like in Ukraine, the United States is fighting with the hands of Ukrainians and mercenaries, so in Russia they are ready to waste biomaterial they do not need in the form of adherents of this cult. The American leadership of Jehovah's Witnesses is made of people unencumbered by moral standards. They are ready for anything. At the same time, ideological support is being launched among American-sponsored religious scholars, who have already started talking about the need for a 'rehabilitation' of the Jehovah's Witnesses."

The Jehovah's Witnesses are accused of operating "sleeping" extremist cells under the leadership of their center in the United States. And the fact that the Brooklyn [again] center of this cult is under the complete control of the American secret services is not longer a secret." Pentecostals, Scientologists, and even "neo-Pagans" are also being prepared by the U.S. intelligence to support the Jehovah's Witnesses' coup, or so Korelov believes.

All these “cults” are described as “just puppet organizations in the hands of a behind-the-scenes puppeteer. This is an element of the socio-political structure of the United States, which they are trying to impose on the whole world. It is also obvious that all American cults are guided from a single center,” a claim also recently [promoted by Novopashin](#).

“Cults” and the United States themselves are portrayed by the lawyer as “something vile, unworthy. Notice the stupidity of their leaders. The same Hubbard—the founder of Scientology—was a degenerate personality. What about the false prophecies of the Adventists? It clearly smacks of mental illness. Therefore, when mentioning American cults, you can twist your finger at your temple. The United States is the spiritual garbage dump of humanity. I have never taken their public-state matrix seriously. In their country there are no people capable of thinking globally, there is no knowledge of their own, everything is bought. Primitive, in a word. [...] The United States has a very vulnerable socio-political system that can be destroyed in a few months. You just need to know their vulnerabilities and be able to influence them.” Russia had not destroyed the United States immediately, Korelov explains, “because too abrupt changes mean hundreds of millions of people who die from wars and upheavals in all countries. I doubt that anyone is ready to take responsibility for such sacrifices. Everything must be progressive and carefully thought out. This is the art of politics.”

However, the lawyer believes that the events in Ukraine and now the preparation of an anti-Putin coup through the Jehovah’s Witnesses represent the beginning of the end for the United States, as Russia could not fail to react. “Russia is not at war with Ukraine. Russia, in fact, is at war with the Satanists of the West FOR Ukraine and the Ukrainian people, to save people, to protect them from the arbitrariness of the United States and other pseudo-democratic states.” In Ukraine, he claims, “there are US bacteriological laboratories that spread the infections around the world, there are secret concentration camps where Ukrainians are tortured and killed, they organize the trade in Ukrainian children and much more. I have seen how the brainwashing technologies of the cults turn the people of the former Soviet republic into zombies. [...] The once flourishing Soviet republic of Ukraine has been turned into a Nazi hell by the American occupiers. I can say with absolute certainty that the United States is carrying out genocide of the population of Ukraine. They methodically send Ukrainians to their death under the pretext of confrontation with Russia, they shoot and hang, or corrupt Ukrainian children in towns and villages. It is scary to watch when our troops enter the villages, and there are dozens of hanged children”—hanged by “the United States and NATO.”

One can regard these preposterous claims as the ravings of a lunatic. However, Korelov is really a well-known lawyer in Russia, and the web site that published his revelations is an official organ of both the Russian main anti-cult organization and the Russian Orthodox Church. He has even [spoken at the Belgian Parliament](#), together with the crème of Western anti-cultists and the Secretary General of a French governmental agency. Accusing the peaceful and non-political Jehovah’s Witnesses of terrorism and of preparing a coup is obviously ridiculous. However, “revelations” of this kind serve as warrants for further persecution of Jehovah’s Witnesses and devotees of other groups labeled as “cults.”

“I know that Russia, a country of believers and traditional values, has a much greater development potential than the entire ‘collective West’ put together,” Korelov concludes. Besides, “God is with us. We will win.”

(*) **Massimo Introvigne** (born June 14, 1955 in Rome) is an Italian sociologist of religions. He is the founder and managing director of the Center for Studies on New Religions ([CESNUR](#)), an international network of scholars who study new religious movements. Introvigne is the author of some 70 books and more than 100 articles in the

field of sociology of religion. He was the main author of the [Enciclopedia delle religioni in Italia](#) (Encyclopedia of Religions in Italy). He is a member of the editorial board for the [Interdisciplinary Journal of Research on Religion](#) and of the executive board of University of California Press' [Nova Religio](#). From January 5 to December 31, 2011, he has served as the "Representative on combating racism, xenophobia and discrimination, with a special focus on discrimination against Christians and members of other religions" of the [Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe](#) (OSCE). From 2012 to 2015 he served as chairperson of the Observatory of Religious Liberty, instituted by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in order to monitor problems of religious liberty on a worldwide scale.

Special Bimonthly FORB Digest (01–15.10.2022)

14.10.2022 - The court placed a man and a woman in a pre-trial detention center after a wave of searches at believers in Primorye

Link to full text in Russian: <https://www.jw-russia.org/news/2022/10/101633.html#update>

On October 6, 2022, in the village of Yaroslavsky (Primorsky Territory), searches were carried out at 12 addresses of those whom the investigation considers to be Jehovah's Witnesses. Two believers, 70-year-old **Boris Andreev** and 49-year-old **Natalya Sharapova**, were detained. The next day, the court sent them to a pre-trial detention center.

According to preliminary information, Andreeva is suspected of organizing the activities of a banned organization (part 1 of article 282.2 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation), and Sharapova of involvement in this activity (part 1.1 of article 282.2 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation). It is known that they will spend at least 22 days in a pre-trial detention center.

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

13.10.2022 - Two priests on trial for opposing Russia's war in Ukraine

Forum 18 - Two Russian Orthodox priests are on criminal trial for opposing Russia's war in Ukraine from a religious perspective and could face imprisonment or massive fines. Fr Nikandr Pinchuk's first full trial hearing in Sverdlovsk Region is due on 17 October. Fr Ioann Kurmoyarov's trial in St Petersburg is due to resume on 14 November. He has been in pre-trial detention since early June. Investigative Committee officials in St Petersburg and Yekaterinburg refused to explain why they brought prosecutions for opposing the war on religious grounds.

Two Russian Orthodox priests are on trial on different criminal charges for their opposition to Russia's war in Ukraine. If convicted, they could be imprisoned or have to pay massive fines. They are the first members of the clergy known to be facing criminal prosecution for protesting against the war from a religious perspective, although others have been charged with lesser administrative offences.

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

13.10.2022 - Moscow hosts the Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church, where Kirill again brings up the issue of "canonical territories"

Before the meeting, the head of the Russian Orthodox Church delivered an opening speech to the Synod members.

"Today, we have a fairly broad agenda consisting of 20 issues, each of these requiring due attention," Patriarch Kirill said.

"The Holy Synod meets at a time that cannot be called calm," the head of the Russian Orthodox Church continued. "Therefore, the task of the Church, which has always been, is and will always be a peacemaking force, is that through our prayers, our labors, and our positive influence on society, we can relieve existing tension as much as possible and, if possible, influence the easing of conflicts that can lead to unpredictable consequences."

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

11.10.2022 - An appeal in Birobidzhan overturned the verdict for the faith of the Postnikov spouses and returned their case for a new trial

Link to full text in Russian: <https://www.jw-russia.org/news/2022/10/111543.html>

On October 11, 2022, a panel of judges of the Birobidzhan Regional Court of the EAO overturned the conviction of **Oleg and Agnessa Postnikov** and sent the criminal case for a new trial to the court of first instance. Believers will once again have to defend their right to freedom of religion in court.

The couple faced reprisals for their faith in May 2018, when a search was conducted in their house as part of the Judgment Day special operation. The prosecution against the Postnikovs was based on the testimony of police officer Yulia Zvereva and another woman who feigned an interest in Bible study. A hidden video camera was installed in her house to record conversations with believers.

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

10.10.2022 - The Court of Appeal in Krasnodar left Lyudmila Shchekoldina sentenced to more than 4 years in prison behind bars

Link to full text in Russian: <https://www.jw-russia.org/news/2022/10/100921.html>

On October 6, 2022, the Krasnodar Regional Court, chaired by Igor Krainik, denied 45-year-old **Lyudmila Shchekoldina** her appeal against the sentence, which has now entered into force.

In May 2022, Lyudmila Shchekoldina was sentenced to 4 years and 1 month in a penal colony for participating in the peaceful worship of Jehovah's Witnesses. The believer appealed the verdict. In her appeal, she emphasized that the court of first instance did not explain why a peaceful way of expressing faith in God was regarded as a crime, while freedom of religion is enshrined in the Constitution of the Russian Federation.

The believer still insists on her innocence and can file a complaint with the cassation instance.

In February 2022, at a meeting of judges, Chairman of the Supreme Court Vyacheslav Lebedev clarified that peaceful religious rites and ceremonies cannot be considered extremist crimes. However, at least 349 Jehovah's Witnesses have passed through Russian prisons since 2017.



10.10.2022 - In Kodinsk, Krasnoyarsk Territory, 59-year-old Ildar Urazbakhtin was given a 3-year suspended sentence for talking about the Bible

Link to full text in Russian: <https://www.jw-russia.org/news/2022/10/101627.html>

On October 10, 2022, the judge of the Kezhemsky District Court of the Krasnoyarsk Territory, Grigory Garbuz, sentenced **Ildar Urazbakhtin** to 3 years probation, equating the study of the Bible with extremist activity. The verdict has not entered into force and can be appealed. The believer insists on his complete innocence.

In July 2021, the Urazbakhtins were searched. They had three minor granddaughters visiting them, the youngest of whom at that time was five years old. A day earlier, for discussing Bible teachings with friends, a criminal case was initiated against Ildar on suspicion of "committing a grave crime" under Part 1 of Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation.

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

06.10.2022 - An appeal in Kirov upheld the verdict against 6 Jehovah's Witnesses

Link to full text in Russian : <https://www.jw-russia.org/news/2022/10/060947.html>

On October 4, 2022, the Kirov Regional Court, chaired by Alexander Kulguskin, denied the appeal of six local believers. The verdict of the first instance - from 2.5 to 6.5 years of probation - came into force.

Andrzej Onischuk, Yevgeny and Andrey Suvorkov, Maxim Khalturin, Vladimir Korobeinikov and Vladimir Vasiliev still maintain their innocence because they practiced their religion legally. Believers have the right to appeal the verdict in cassation.

Speaking with the last word in the Court of Appeal, Andrzej Onischuk noted that he had been a Jehovah's Witness for more than 30 years and lived according to biblical principles. He said: "As a believer, I never even thought about extremism... My inner convictions do not allow me to oppose the state system." Vladimir Vasiliev also noted: "I profess religious views that are not prohibited by law. I have never had anything to do with extremism."

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

04.10.2022 - Four-year jail term if Russia gets back exiled Muslim?

Forum 18 - If Russia succeeds in getting back exiled **Imam Ilkhom Merazhov**, he could be tried and punished with a maximum four-year jail term. He left Russia in 2015, but in June 2022 the Novosibirsk FSB reopened the criminal case to punish him for meeting with others to study the works of theologian Said Nursi. On 8 September, a Novosibirsk court issued a detention order in absentia. The FSB has sought to have an Interpol Red Notice issued, though it remains unclear whether Interpol has approved any request.

The FSB security service has reopened a criminal case against a Muslim who met with others to study the works of the late Turkish theologian Said Nursi – despite the fact that he has been living outside Russia since 2015. The FSB in Novosibirsk suspended its investigation of Imam Ilkhom Merazhov in January 2018, after it became clear that he had moved abroad, but Novosibirsk Regional Prosecutor's Office overturned this decision in June 2022 and returned the case to investigators.



[Continue reading...](#)

03.10.2022 - The Russian Church says its relations with Vatican actually frozen

Interfax-religion - Moscow, October 3, Interfax - The relations of the Russian Orthodox Church with the Roman Catholic Church are really frozen now, Metropolitan Anthony of Volokolamsk, head of the Department for External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate, said.

"Lately, unfortunately, I have to say that our relations are practically frozen," he said on air of the *Church and the World* program on *Russia-24* TV.

According to the metropolitan, some comments of Pope Francis and his assistants "do not contribute at all" to the preparation of the Pontiff's meeting with Patriarch Kirill and further cooperation between the two Churches.

To illustrate his words, the representative of Russian Church recalled that the last conversation between the patriarch and the pope, held in March via remote communication, was of a benevolent nature. However, after a while the Russian Church was surprised to read the interview of pontiff, where he "caricatured this meeting, allowed expressions (...) absolutely impermissible in this context and informed that the meeting would not take place and that, in general, he would not go anywhere."

Special Bimonthly FORB Digest (16–30.09.2022)

30.09.2022 - 100th Jehovah's Witness sent to jail in Russia: 44-year-old Dmitry Dolzhikov is in a pre-trial detention center in Novosibirsk

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2022/09/301615.html>

As of September 30, 2022, there are 95 men and 5 women who profess the religion of Jehovah's Witnesses behind bars. Of these, 32 people are in the colony, 68 people are in the pre-trial detention center. The 100th prisoner was **Dmitry Dolzhikov**, who was arrested after a raid on Jehovah's Witnesses in Chelyabinsk.

On September 2, 2022, the case against Dolzhikov was opened by investigator Alexander Chepenko, a colonel of justice known for the criminal prosecution of believers in the Chelyabinsk region.

[Continue reading...](#)

29.09.2022 - Jehovah's Witnesses searched in Crimea

Sova Center - On September 28, 2022, the homes of at least eight Jehovah's Witnesses living in the settlements of Nizhnegorsky and Krasnogvardeyskoye (Crimea) were searched. Two believers - 50-year-old **Sergei Parfenovich** and 49-year-old **Alexander Vinichenko** - were detained and taken to Simferopol. A case was initiated against Parfenovich under Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code (organization of the activities of an extremist organization or participation in it).

[Continue reading...](#)

26.09.2022 - 200 people on criminal trial for exercising freedom of religion or belief

Forum 18 - Nearly 200 Jehovah's Witnesses and 9 Muslims who meet to study the works of the late Turkish theologian Said Nursi are currently on criminal trial on charges of "continuing the activities" of organisations which Russian courts have banned as "extremist". If convicted, they could be imprisoned for up to a decade, spend years under the multiple restrictions of a suspended sentence, or pay fines of up to one year's average wage.

Jehovah's Witnesses are still facing criminal conviction and possible imprisonment for exercising their freedom of religion and belief in spite of the issuance, in October 2021, of amended guidance for judges in extremism-related cases.

[Continue reading...](#)

23.09.2022 - Case of Jehovah's Witness Krieger sent for retrial

Sova center - On September 22, 2022, the court of the Jewish Autonomous Region reconsidered the appeal against the sentence of Jehovah's Witness **Natalya Krieger**, convicted under Part 2 of Art. 282.2 (participation in the activities of an extremist organization). The verdict was canceled, the case was sent to the Birobidzhan District Court for a new trial.

On July 30, 2021, Birobidzhansky sentenced Krieger to two and a half years of suspended imprisonment, and on November 25, 2021, the Court of the Jewish Autonomous Region approved this sentence. However, in August 2022, the Ninth Cassation Court of General Jurisdiction annulled the appeal ruling of the EAO court.

[Continue reading...](#)

22.09.2022 - The prosecutor's office requested five years in prison for a Jehovah's Witness from the Khabarovsk Territory

Sova Center - On September 21, 2022, during a debate in the Solnechny District Court of the Khabarovsk Territory, a representative of the prosecutor's office asked the court to appoint Boris Yagovitov, a Jehovah's Witness, accused of chch. 1.1 and 2 Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code (involvement in the activities of an extremist organization and participation in it), five years in prison with restriction of freedom for two years and eleven months.

[Continue reading...](#)

21.09.2022 - New Creation Church: Evangelical Church accused of "brainwashing" in Russia

Bitter Winter - On September 14, 2022, the trial of Stanislav Moskvitin, pastor of the Apostolic Center Church "New Creation" started in Omsk, Russia.

On July 18, 2021, his place of worship, the basement floor of an office building in the center of Omsk, had been raided by the FSB. Parishioners described the raid as quite unexpected. Masked security officers entered the premises of New Creation and detained Moskvitin.

Moskvitin launched his church in 2014, and registered it in 2016, after a training in Seattle, Washington under Pastor Andrey Shapovalov, who runs the Transformation Center Church, a large nondenominational Slavic Evangelical community. Shapovalov has cooperated with Aleksey Ledyaev, the founder of the Latvian New Generation Church, whose Russian communities have been recently raided by FSB and even accused of being involved in espionage and sabotage operations on behalf of the Ukrainian intelligence.

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21.09.2022 - The Court sentenced six of Jehovah's Witnesses in Gukovo to 6.5 to 7 years in prison for talking about God

Link to full text in Russian : <https://jw-russia.org/news/2022/09/210926.html>

On September 19, 2022, the judge of the Gukovo City Court of the Rostov Region, Natalya Batura, sentenced Aleksey Goreliy and Oleg Shidlovskiy to 6.5 years in penal colony; Nikita Moiseyev, Aleksey Dyadkin, Vladimir Popov and Yevgeniy Razumov each received 7 years in penal colony.

The court considered it a crime to take part in peaceful religious meetings, pray and perform religious songs.

[Continue reading...](#)

21.09.2022 - Disabled Jehovah's Witness sentenced to probation in Primorsky Territory

Sova Center - On September 20, 2022, the Partizan City Court of Primorsky Krai found 53-year-old Jehovah's Witness **Liya Maltseva** guilty under Part 2 of Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code (participation in the activities of an extremist organization). She was sentenced to two years and three months' imprisonment with a suspended sentence of seven months. The case against the believer was opened in August 2020. The fact that the case was brought to court became known in June 2021.

[Continue reading...](#)

20.09.2022 - Jehovah's Witnesses sentenced to real terms in the Rostov Region

Sova Center - On September 20, 2022, the Gukovsky City Court of the Rostov Region passed a sentence on six Jehovah's Witnesses who were charged under Part 1 of Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code (organization of the activities of an extremist organization). The court found all defendants guilty and appointed real terms of imprisonment.

Vladimir Popov, Aleksey Dyadkin, Yevgeny Razumov and Nikita Moiseev each received seven years in prison in a penal colony with a five-year ban on organizational activities in public and religious associations and with a one-year restriction of freedom. Aleksey Gorely and Oleg Shidlovsky were each sentenced to six and a half years in prison, also with a five-year ban on organizational activities in public and religious associations and with restriction of freedom for a year.

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33 Jehovah's Witnesses sentenced to prison terms since 1 January 2022

By Willy Fautré

HRWF (21.09.2022) - The persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses is going on unabated. In the last eight months, 33 of them have been sentenced for merely practicing their religion in private and put behind bars.

Here is the list of the last seven Jehovah's Witnesses sentenced in September 2022 and serving heavy prison terms:

Aleksey Valeriевич **Dyadkin**, 33 years (7 years)
Nikita Valeriевич **Moiseyev**, 32 years (7 years)
Vladimir Nikolayevich **Popov**, 55 years (7 years)
Yevgeniy Viktorovich **Razumov**, 43 years
Oleg Grigoriyevich **Shidlovskiy**, 53 years (6 1/2 years)
Aleksey Vladimirovich **Goreliy**, 42 years (6 1/2 years)
Nikolay, Aleksandrovich **Stepanov**, 48 years (4 years)

They are prosecuted under Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 1 (Organization of the activities of a prohibited extremist organization).

Article 282.2, Part 1 – Six to 10 years' imprisonment, plus a compulsory ban on holding certain positions and/or carrying out certain activities for up to 10 years and compulsory restrictions on freedom for one to two years after release; or a 400,000 to 800,000 Rouble fine.

Case History

- August 2020, FSB officers raided 17 homes of Jehovah's Witnesses in three cities in the Rostov Region as well as in the city of Kursk. Aleksey Dyadkin, Aleksey Goreliy, Nikita Moiseyev, Vladimir Popov, Yevgeniy Razumov, and Oleg Shidlovskiy were ordered to pretrial detention
- June 2021, a lawyer visited the six men at the detention center. They reported poor conditions, including cell temperatures reaching 104 degrees Fahrenheit (40 Celsius), mold on the walls, and inmates infected with COVID-19
- July 2021, due to experiencing respiratory problems, Vladimir Popov was transferred to a medical unit at a different detention center before being subsequently admitted to a hospital
- September 2021, Vladimir returned to the detention center after being hospitalized for over two months
- November 2021, the criminal trial began
- For additional case information and personal details, see the below links (any images you see on either site can be made available for your use, upon request):
 - <https://jw-russia.org/cases/gukovo.html>
 - <https://www.jw.org/en/news/jw/region/russia/Jehovah-Supports-the-Families-of-Six-Brothers-in-Pretrial-Detention/>

List of 26 other Jehovah's Witnesses sentenced to prison terms in 2022:

Aleksey Valeriевич **Dyadkin**, 33 years (7 years)
Nikita Valeriевич **Moiseyev**, 32 years (7 years)
Vladimir Nikolayevich **Popov**, 55 years (7 years)
Yevgeniy Viktorovich **Razumov**, 43 years
Oleg Grigoriyevich **Shidlovskiy**, 53 years (6 1/2 years)
Aleksey Vladimirovich **Goreliy**, 42 years (6 1/2 years)
Nikolay, Aleksandrovich **Stepanov**, 48 years (4 years)

25 August 2022: Vladimir Atryakhin, 35 years (6 years)
Georgiy Nikulin, 59 years (4 years and 2 months)
Yelena Nikulina, 54 years (4 years and 2 months)
Aleksandr Shevchuk, 33 years (2 years)
Aleksandr Korolev, 42 years (2 years)
Denis Antonov, 46 years (2 years)

06 June 2022: Vladimir Ermolaev, 34 years (6 ½ years)
Alexander Putintsev, 48 years (6 ½ years)
Igor Mamalimov, 46 years (6 years in a colony)

31 May 2002: Rustam Seidkuliev, 45 years old (2 years and 4 months)

23 May 2022: Lyudmila Shchekoldina, 46 years '4 years and 1 month)
Andrey Vlasov, 53 years old (7 years)
Lyudmila Shchekoldina, 45 years old (4 years and 1 month in a penal colony)

26 April 2022: Andrey Ledyakin, 34 years old (2 years and 2 months)

19 April 2022: Konstantin Samsonov, 45 years old (7 years 1/2 years)

18 March 2022: Valeriy Rogozin, 60 years old (6 years and 5 months in a penal colony)
Denis Peresunko, 54 years old (6 years and 6 months)
Sergey Melnik, 57 years old (6 years in a penal colony)
Igor Egozaryan, 57 years old (6 years in a penal colony)

07 February 2022: Yuriy Saveliyev, 68 years old (6 years + 1 year of restricted freedom)

02 February 2022: Anatoliy Gorbunov, 64 years old (6 years)

25 January 2022: Anna Safronova, 57 years old (6 years)

20 January 2022: Yevgeny Korotun, 52 years old (7 years + 2 years of restricted freedom)
Andrei Kolesnichenko, 52 years old (4 years + 1 year of restricted freedom)

19 January 2022: Alexei Ershov, 68 years old (3 years)

17 January 2022: Maksim Beltikov, 42 years old (2 years)

Special Bimonthly FORB Digest (01–15.09.2022)

14.09.2022 - In Chelyabinsk, special forces stormed the apartments of Jehovah's Witnesses. Believer arrested.

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2022/09/140838.html>

On September 8, 2022, a raid on 13 houses of Jehovah's Witnesses in Chelyabinsk took place — the security forces broke out the windows and doors of the apartments. One of the believers, **Dmitriy Dolzhikov**, was detained and taken 1,500 kilometers away to Novosibirsk, where he was taken into custody.

The searches in the houses of the believers began in the evening and continued until midnight, and video footage was taken. Some were detained and taken away for interrogation to the Investigative Committee, while others were given summons for the next morning. These events affected about 34 people in total.

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

14.09.2022 - Russian Supreme Court brands as terrorist, bans Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan

Interfax - The Russian Supreme Court branded the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan as terrorist and banned its operations in Russia on Wednesday, the court's press service told *Interfax*.

"The court has upheld a motion from the Russian Prosecutor General's Office to designate the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan as terrorist and to ban its activity in the Russian territory," a court representative said.

Russian Prosecutor General Igor Krasnov said during a working visit to Tajikistan that such a motion had been filed.

Tajikistan branded the party as terrorist and banned its operations a long time ago. It is also on the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)'s register of terrorist organizations.

12.09.2022 - In the Chelyabinsk region, a new case was initiated on participation in the organization of Jehovah's Witnesses

Sova Center - On September 12, 2022, the investigative department of the Investigative Committee of Russia for the Chelyabinsk Region announced that a criminal case had been initiated under Part 2 of Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code (participation in the activities of an extremist organization).

According to the Investigative Committee, since 2017 the suspect has been involved in the work of the local religious organization of Jehovah's Witnesses and studied religious literature with other participants, which, according to the investigation, contained "statements degrading human dignity on the principle of attitude towards religion and elements of propaganda of the exclusivity of one religion over another".

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

09.09.2022 - Crimean Tatar sentenced to 11 years in prison on charges of participating in Hizb ut-Tahrir

Sova center - On September 9, 2022, the Southern District Military Court found the Crimean Tatar **Yashar Shikhametov** guilty under Part 2 of Art. 205.5 of the Criminal Code (participation in the activities of a terrorist organization) and sentenced him to eleven years

in prison with the first four years in prison. In July, the prosecutor requested the same punishment for Shikhametov.

Shikhametov was detained in Crimea in February 2021, along with five other local residents – Leinur Seydametov, Timur Yalkabov, Azamat Eyupov, Ernest Ibragimov and Oleg Fedorov. All of them were charged with involvement in the Islamic radical party Hizb ut-Tahrir, which is recognized as a terrorist organization in Russia.

[Continue reading...](#)

08.09.2022 - The researchers conclude that the Russian military often intentionally destroys churches and religious buildings

Risu - The Academic Religious Studies Workshop initiated the "Religion in Fire" project, which was supported by the State Service of Ukraine for Ethnopolitics and Freedom of Conscience and the Congress of National Communities of Ukraine.

One of the authors, Karen Nikiforov, spoke about the project with "Vechirniy Kyiv" ("Evening Kyiv"). Nikiforov is the head of the theology, religious studies and history of religion section of the Kyiv Small Academy of Sciences and a member of the expert commission of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine on history.

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08.09.2022 - Church-State cooperation and its impact on freedom of religion or belief and on gender issues in Russia

Risu - The cooperation between the Russian state and the Russian Orthodox Church has many legal implications. One such implication is that the ethical teachings of the Church exert influence on state policies in matters such as sexuality, gender, and family. This influence is one of this article's main areas of focus. The Church's teachings find wide support in Russian public opinion and thus indirectly influence lawmaking and law application in that nation. Another issue this article addresses is how the Church benefits from alliances with the State that enable it to consolidate itself by suppressing possible internal dissent and fighting its opponents among non-traditional religious denominations.

[Continue reading...](#)

06.09.2022 - Court passes judgment on Jehovah's Witnesses from Vologda

Sova Center - On September 5, 2022, the Vologda City Court sentenced Jehovah's Witnesses **Nikolai Stepanov and Yuri Baranov**. Both were found guilty of organizing the activities of an extremist organization (part 1 of article 282.2 of the Criminal Code). Stepanov was sentenced to four years in prison. He was taken into custody in the courtroom. Baranov received four years probation. The state prosecutor requested seven years of real time for Stepanov and seven years of probation for Baranov.

According to the investigation, with which the court agreed, from 2017 to 2019, the defendants organized the activities of the banned local religious organization of Jehovah's Witnesses "Vologda" and "took part in its activities of an extremist nature, collecting money to finance it."

[Continue reading...](#)

05.09.2022 - Supreme Court of Tatarstan approves sentencing of four Jehovah's Witnesses

Sova Center - On September 2, 2022, the Supreme Court of the Republic of Tatarstan upheld the judgment handed down by the Naberezhnye Chelny City Court against four Jehovah's Witnesses on December 16, 2021. Recall that **Vladimir Myakushin** was found guilty under Part 1 of Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code (organization of the activities of an extremist organization) and Part 1 of Art. 282.3 of the Criminal Code (financing of extremism) and sentenced to three years and one month of imprisonment with a two-year probationary period. **Aidar Yulmetiev** received part 1 of Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code two years nine months suspended with a two-year probationary period, **Ilham Karimov** and **Konstantin Matrashov** - two and a half years each.

The criminal case was initiated in the spring of 2018 under cc. 1, 1.1 and 2 Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code (organization of the activities of an extremist organization, recruitment into it and participation in its activities). Four of the accused spent six months in a pre-trial detention center, then they were transferred under house arrest, and in the spring of 2019 they took a written undertaking not to leave.

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Criminal trial against six Muslims following Turkish theologian Said Nursi

Willy Fautré, director of Human Rights Without Frontiers (HRWF)

HRWF (09.09.2022) <https://hrwf.eu> - On 22 September, Moscow's Kuzminsky District Court is due to begin the largest criminal trial for eight years of six Muslims who met to study the works of the Turkish theologian Said Nursi (*). Since their arrest in October 2021, they have been in pre-trial detention in Moscow's Investigation Prison No. 2, known as Butyrka.

Their names are: **Yevgeny Pavlovich Tarasov, Mukazhan Gazizovich Ksyupov, Parviz Ogtay ogly Zeynalov, Urdash Zubayruyevich Abdullayev, Ilmir Salikhovich Abdullin, Nikolay Mironovich Nesterovich.**

They stand accused of "organising" and "participating in" the activities of "Nurdzhular", which was banned as extremist in 2008 but which Muslims in Russia deny ever existed as a formal organisation.

They are prosecuted under Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 1 or Part 2 ("Organisation of" or "Participation in the activity of a social or religious association or other organisation in relation to which a court has adopted a decision legally in force on liquidation or ban on the activity in connection with the carrying out of extremist activity"):

Article 282.2, Part 1 – six to 10 years' imprisonment, plus a compulsory ban on holding certain positions and/or carrying out certain activities for up to 10 years and compulsory restrictions on freedom for one to two years after release; or a 400,000 to 800,000 Rouble fine;

Article 282.2, Part 2 – two to six years' imprisonment, plus a possible ban on holding

certain positions and/or carrying out certain activities for up to five years and compulsory restrictions on freedom for up to one year after release; or a 300,000 to 600,000 Rouble fine; or one to four years' assigned labour, plus a possible ban on holding certain positions and/or carrying out certain activities for up to three years and compulsory restrictions on freedom for up to one year.

On 25 August 2022, the six Said Nursi followers appeared at Kuzminsky District Court in Moscow, for the preliminary hearing in the criminal case opened against them for meeting to study the writings of Said Nursi.

A correspondent of HRWF summarized the proceedings as follows:

«On 25 August 2022, a preliminary hearing was held in a criminal case against six citizens of the Russian Federation, namely **Yevgeny Pavlovich Tarasov, Mukazhan Gazizovich Ksyupov, Parviz Ogtay ogly Zeynalov, Urdash Zubayruyevich Abdullayev, Ilmir Salikhovich Abdullin, Nikolay Mironovich Nesterovich** accused of committing a crime under Article 282.2, Part 2 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation. None of the defendants had previous convictions.

The preliminary meeting was also attended by seven lawyers, defenders of the accused, who filed a number of motions.

Seven lawyers defending the accused also attended the preliminary hearing and filed a number of motions.

Defence counsel I.I. Ptashnik requested that the case be returned to the prosecutor for further investigation, referring to the fact that the investigator had set out his personal conclusions in the indictment, already considering the guilt of the accused to be proven in advance. He also requested that the report of one of the investigative actions, a confrontation, be excluded from the evidence because, in his view, this investigative action had been conducted in breach of the Code of Criminal Procedure.

A similar petition for the exclusion of the protocol of another one of the protocols of confrontation from among the evidence was filed by the defender Saltykov A.A.

The defence counsels Sychev S.A. and Bakhtin R.A. filed a motion to return the criminal case to the prosecutor's office for additional investigation, arguing that the court would be deprived of the opportunity to make a legal decision, since the material evidence - printed publications in various foreign languages - had not been translated into Russian and their examination during the trial would be problematic and expensive. In addition, the defendants could not familiarize themselves with this evidence due to the lack of translation into Russian.

The representative of the prosecutor's office expressed her objections to the above petitions, pointing out that the indictment was drawn up in accordance with the requirements of the law, and it was premature to talk about the exclusion of evidence from the case. In addition, the representative of the prosecutor's office indicated that the measure of detention concerning all six accused was chosen on the basis of the law, and there were no grounds for changing or canceling such a measure. On that basis, the representative of the prosecutor's office asked the court to leave the chosen preventive measure in force and extend it for a period of six months from the date on which the criminal case came before the court.

After hearing the prosecution and the defense, the court stated that it saw no grounds for satisfying the defense lawyers' motions to return the case to the prosecutor for additional investigation, because the court had not established the statutory grounds (Article 237 of the Russian Criminal Code) providing for the rules for unconditional return of the case to

the prosecutor. The court pointed out that the arguments of the defense about the inadmissibility of evidence were limited to an assessment of the evidence collected in the case, which is within the competence of the court when making a final decision in a criminal case, and it is for the court to assess it within the established procedure. There were no grounds for recognizing the evidence as inadmissible, since the court had not yet begun to consider the merits of the case, and the prosecution had not begun to provide evidence.

Having considered the petition of the representative of the prosecutor's office to apply a preventive measure for each of the accused and having heard the opinions of the prosecution and the defense, the court assessed the personality of each of the accused and decided to keep the existing preventive measure – pretrial detention - since there were no grounds for canceling or amending such a preventive measure. At the same time, the court ordered that such a preventive measure be imposed for a period of six months - from the date the criminal case was received by the court and until February 10, 2023.

The court scheduled the hearing of the case in open court for 1 September 2022 at 12:00». The hearing was however afterwards postponed to 22 September.

On 28 August 2018, the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) in [Strasbourg found that Russian bans on Nursi's works violated Article 10](#) ("Freedom of expression") of the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (Application Nos. 1413/08 and 28621/11).

(*) More information about Said Nursi [here](#)

Photo: Moscow's Kuzminsky District Court. Credit: Google

Уголовный процесс против шести мусульман по делу турецкого богослова Саида Нурси

Вилли Фотре, директор организации «Права человека без границ» (HRWF)

HRWF (09.08.2022) – <https://hrwf.eu> – 22 сентября Кузьминский районный суд Москвы должен начать крупнейший за восемь лет уголовный процесс над шестью мусульманами, собравшимися для изучения трудов турецкого богослова Саида Нурси (*). С момента ареста в октябре 2021 года они находятся в предварительном заключении в московском следственном изоляторе № 2, известном как Бутырка.

Их имена: **Тарасов Евгений Павлович, Ксюпов Мукажан Газизович, Зейналов Парвиз Октай оглы, Абдуллаев Урдаш Зубайруевич, Абдуллин Ильмир Салихович, Несторович Николай Миронович.**

Их обвиняют в «организации» и «участии» в деятельности «Нурджулар», которая была запрещена как экстремистская организация в 2008 году, но мусульмане в России отрицают, что она вообще существовала как официальная организация.

Их преследуют по статье 282.2 УК РФ («Организация деятельности экстремистской организации», предусматривающей уголовную ответственность как за «Организацию», так и за «Участие в деятельности общественного или религиозного объединения либо

иной организации, в отношении которой судом принято вступившее в законную силу решение о ликвидации или запрещении деятельность в связи с осуществлением экстремистской деятельности»):

ч. 1 ст. 282.2 - от шести до десяти лет лишения свободы с лишением права занимать определенные должности и/или заниматься определенной деятельностью на срок до десяти лет и с ограничением свободы на срок от одного года до двух лет после освобождения; или штраф в размере от 400 000 до 800 000 рублей или в размере заработной платы или иного дохода осужденного за период от двух до четырех лет.

ч. 2 ст. 282.2 - от двух до шести лет лишения свободы с возможным лишением права занимать определенные должности или заниматься определенной деятельностью на срок до пяти лет и с принудительным ограничением свободы на срок до одного года после освобождения; или штраф от 300 000 до 600 000 рублей или в размере заработной платы или иного дохода осужденного за период от двух до трех лет; или от одного до четырех лет принудительных работ плюс возможный запрет занимать определенные должности и/или заниматься определенной деятельностью на срок до трех лет и с ограничением свободы на срок до одного года.

«25 августа 2022 года шестеро последователей Саида Нурси были доставлены в Кузьминский районный суд г. Москвы на предварительное заседание по уголовному делу, возбужденному против них за совместное изучение произведений Саида Нурси.

Корреспондент HRWF резюмировал происходящее следующим образом:

«25 августа 2022 года состоялось предварительное судебное заседание по уголовному делу в отношении шестерых граждан Российской Федерации, а именно **Тарасова Евгения Павловича, Ксюпова Мукажана Газизовича, Зейналова Парвиза Октая оглы, Абдуллаева Урдаша Зубайруевича, Абдуллина Ильмира Салиховича, Нестеровича Николая Мироновича**, обвиняемых совершения преступления, предусмотренного ч. 2 ст. 282.2 УК РФ. Ни один из обвиняемых ранее не был судим.

В предварительном заседании также приняли участие семь адвокатов - защитников обвиняемых, которые заявили ряд ходатайств.

Зашитник Пташник И.И. просил вернуть дело прокурору для дополнительного расследования, ссылаясь на то, что следователь в обвинительном заключении изложил свои личные выводы, уже считая вину обвиняемых доказанной заранее. Он также просил исключить из числа доказательств протокол одного из следственных действий — очной ставки, поскольку, по его мнению, данное следственное действие проводилось с нарушением Уголовно-процессуального кодекса.

Аналогичное ходатайство об исключении протокола еще одного из протоколов очной ставки из числа доказательств подал защитник Салтыков А.А.

Зашитники Сычев С.А. и Бахтин Р.А. заявили ходатайство о возвращении уголовного дела прокурору для производства дополнительного расследования, мотивируя это тем, что суд будет лишен возможности вынести законное решение, так как вещественные доказательства - печатные издания на различных иностранных языках не были переведены на русский язык и их исследование в ходе судебного заседания будет проблематичным и дорогостоящим. Кроме того, подсудимые не могли ознакомиться с этими доказательствами из-за отсутствия перевода на русский язык.

Представитель прокуратуры высказала свои возражения по вышеуказанным ходатайствам, указав, что обвинительное заключение составлено в соответствии с требованиями закона, и говорить об исключении доказательств из дела преждевременно. Кроме того, представитель прокуратуры указал, что мера пресечения

в виде заключения под стражу в отношении всех шестерых обвиняемых избрана на основании закона, оснований для изменения или отмены такой меры нет. На основании этого представитель прокуратуры просила суд оставить избранную меру пресечения в силе и продлить ее на период с момента поступления уголовного дела в суд и на шесть месяцев.

Заслушав сторону обвинения и защиты, суд указал, что не усматривает оснований для удовлетворения ходатайств защитников о возвращении дела прокурору для дополнительного расследования, поскольку судом не установлены предусмотренные законом основания (статья 237 УК РФ), предусматривающие правила о безусловном возвращении дела прокурору. Суд указал, что доводы защиты о недопустимости доказательств сводятся к оценке собранных по делу доказательств, что входит в компетенцию суда при вынесении окончательного решения по уголовному делу, и именно суд будет оценивать их в установленном порядке. Оснований для признания доказательств недопустимыми нет, так как суд еще не приступил к рассмотрению дела по существу, а сторона обвинения не приступила к представлению доказательств.

Рассмотрев ходатайство представителя прокуратуры об избрании меры пресечения каждому из обвиняемых, заслушав мнения стороны обвинения и стороны защиты, суд дал оценку личности каждого из обвиняемых и постановил меру пресечения оставить прежней - заключение под стражу, так как оснований для отмены или изменения такой меры пресечения нет. При этом суд постановил назначить такую меру пресечения сроком на 6 месяцев - со дня поступления уголовного дела в суд и до 10 февраля 2023 года.

Суд назначил рассмотрение дела в открытом судебном заседании на 1 сентября 2022 года в 12:00».

В итоге он был перенесен на 22 сентября.

28 августа 2018 г. Европейский суд по правам человека (ЕСПЧ) в Страсбурге установил, что российские запреты на произведения Нурси нарушают статью 10 («Свобода выражения мнений») Европейской конвенции о правах человека и основных свободах (обращение № 1413/08). и 28621/11).

(*) Более подробная информация о Сайде Нурси на английском языке [здесь](#)

Кузьминский районный суд Москвы. Credit: Google

Final sentences to prison terms for 26 Jehovah's Witnesses since 1 January 2022

By Willy Fautré

The persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses is going on unabated. In the last eight months, 26 of them have been sentenced for merely practicing their religion in private and put behind bars. Here is the list of the last six Jehovah's Witnesses sentenced on 25 August 2022 and serving heavy prison terms:



Human Rights Without Frontiers FoRB Russia

Vladimir Atryakhin, 35 years (6 years)
Georgiy Nikulin, 59 years (4 years and 2 months)
Yelena Nikulina, 54 years (4 years and 2 months)
Aleksandr Shevchuk, 33 years (2 years)
Aleksandr Korolev, 42 years (2 years)
Denis Antonov, 46 years (2 years)

They were all prosecuted under Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 2 ("Organisation of" or "Participation in the activity of a social or religious association or other organisation in relation to which a court has adopted a decision legally in force on liquidation or ban on the activity in connection with the carrying out of extremist activity"):

Article 282.2, Part 2 – two to six years' imprisonment, plus a possible ban on holding certain positions and/or carrying out certain activities for up to five years and compulsory restrictions on freedom for up to one year after release; or a 300,000 to 600,000 Rouble fine; or one to four years' assigned labour, plus a possible ban on holding certain positions and/or carrying out certain activities for up to three years and compulsory restrictions on freedom for up to one year.

Others who were arrested in 2022 are detained and waiting for their trial.

In 2019, several Jehovah's Witnesses of Saransk, a city located far in Siberia, were prosecuted for gathering to discuss about the Bible. As the movement of Jehovah's Witnesses has been banned as an extremist organization since 2017, all their collective activities are considered illegal.

Vladimir Atryakhin

Vladimir Atryakhin was born in 1987 in the village of Rozhdestveno (Mordovia). Since his childhood, he has loved sports and has enjoyed playing football, volleyball, hockey...

He is a professional programmer and works as a system administrator for two companies. He also edits a scientific journal at Mordovian State University. He is respected by the neighbors—he heads the house committee in the residential building where he lives.

In 2009, Vladimir got married with Mariya. The couple have two small children who were 7 months and 2 years old at the time of their father's arrest. More [here](#).

Georgiy Nikulin

Georgiy Nikulin was born in 1963 in the city of Rovenki (Ukraine). After school, he graduated from college with a degree in driver-car mechanic. Subsequently, he mastered several more specialties: graphic designer, satellite communications radio technician, equipment maintenance mechanic, printing, woodcarving. He worked in all these areas.

He often had to move in connection with work - he lived in Zhytomyr (Ukraine), Tolyatti (Samara region) and in Yakutia. Over time, together with his wife Elena, he moved to Saransk, where the family was able to settle in their own house for the first time.

Sudden criminal prosecution and a long stay in a pre-trial detention center undermined his health. More [here](#).

Elena Nikulina

Elena Nikulina was born in 1968 in the village of Monastyrsk (Mordovia). As a child, Elena was fond of cross-country skiing and sewing.

After school, she studied as a dressmaker and cutter. In search of work, she moved to Saransk and Togliatti. She worked as a seamstress at various enterprises, was engaged in cleaning the premises. In 2016, Elena married Georgiy.

The criminal prosecution affected both spouses: Georgiy spent 147 days behind bars, both lost their jobs and lost their livelihoods. Elena experienced a nervous shock, she became afraid to stay at home alone. More [here](#).

Aleksandr Shevchuk

Aleksandr Shevchuk was born in 1989 in Pyatigorsk (Stavropol Territory). He grew up in a family of Jehovah's Witnesses. Many of his relatives survived the religious persecution of the Soviet years. His great-grandparents were exiled in 1951 to Siberia where his parents were born.

At school, he was a motivated student. He learnt garden and park construction. When he was called up for military service, he opted for an alternative civilian service which he carried out in Khimki near Moscow.

Later he moved to Saransk, where he worked in the furniture industry. He loves sports, especially basketball and table tennis. More [here](#).

Aleksandr Korolev

Aleksandr Korolev was born in 1978 in the Zemetchinsky district of the Penza region.

He became a tractor driver and worked on a collective farm as a shepherd and livestock breeder. Recently he has worked as a carpenter-fitter of wooden products.

For some time, he lived in the village of Akim-Sergeevka (Mordovia) and then moved to Saransk where he met his future wife Natalya. At that time, she was raising her son alone. They got married in 2006.

The criminal prosecution has brought anxiety, worry and uncertainty into the life of the family. The parents of Aleksandr and Natalya worry about their spouses and try to support them. More [here](#).

Denis Antonov

Denis Antonov was born in 1976 in Syktyvkar (Komi Republic). His family moved frequently, as his father worked as an agronomist and helped on collective farms in the north of Siberia.

He entered a technical school in Vorkuta, in the north of Siberia, where he received a degree in mining electromechanics. For about five years he worked at the mine as an underground electrician, then as a janitor, a building maintenance worker, and most recently as a house foreman.

In 2015, Denis married Olga, whom he had known since 1996. She worked as a cook in a coal factory and in a kindergarten. The couple moved from Vorkuta to Saransk to take care of Olga's elderly mother, who was left alone after her husband's death. During a search, the authorities took away their work books and other documents related to their religion. More [here](#).

List of 20 other Jehovah's Witnesses sentenced to prison terms in 2022:

06 June 2022: Vladimir Ermolaev, 34 years (6 ½ years)

Alexander Putintsev, 48 years (6 ½ years)

Igor Mamalimov, 46 years (6 years in a colony)

31 May 2002: Rustam Seidkuliev, 45 years old (2 years and 4 months)

23 May 2022: Lyudmila Shchekoldina, 46 years '4 years and 1 month)

Andrey Vlasov, 53 years old (7 years)

Lyudmila Shchekoldina, 45 years old (4 years and 1 month in a penal colony)

26 April 2022: Andrey Ledyakin, 34 years old (2 years and 2 months)

19 April 2022: Konstantin Samsonov, 45 years old (7 years 1/2 years)

18 March 2022: Valeriy Rogozin, 60 years old (6 years and 5 months in a penal colony)

Denis Peresunko, 54 years old (6 years and 6 months)

Sergey Melnik, 57 years old (6 years in a penal colony)

Igor Egozaryan, 57 years old (6 years in a penal colony)

07 February 2022: Yuriy Saveliyev, 68 years old (6 years + 1 year of restricted freedom)

02 February 2022: Anatoliy Gorbunov, 64 years old (6 years)

25 January 2022: Anna Safronova, 57 years old (6 years)

20 January 2022: Yevgeny Korotun, 52 years old (7 years + 2 years of restricted freedom)

Andrei Kolesnichenko, 52 years old (4 years + 1 year of restricted freedom)

19 January 2022: Alexei Ershov, 68 years old (3 years)

17 January 2022: Maksim Beltikov, 42 years old (2 years)

Special Bimonthly FORB Digest (16–31.08.2022)

29.08.2022 - Six who met to study their faith on trial in Moscow

Forum 18 - The largest trial for nearly eight years of Muslims who met to study the works of the late Turkish Muslim theologian Said Nursi began in the Russian capital with a preliminary hearing on 25 August: **Yevgeny Pavlovich Tarasov, Mukazhan Gazizovich Ksyupov, Parviz Ogtay ofly Zeynalov, Urdash Zubayruyevich Abdullayev, Ilmir Salikhovich Abdullin, Nikolay Mironovich Nesterovich.**

The six Moscow residents stand accused of "organising" and "participating in" the activities of "Nurdzhular", which was banned as extremist in 2008 but which Muslims in Russia deny ever existed as a formal organisation. If convicted, the six men could face lengthy prison sentences or six-figure fines.

[Continue reading...](#)

26.08.2022 - A Mordovia Court sentenced six Saransk-based Jehovah's Witnesses, including a woman, to two to six years in prison for practicing their faith

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2022/08/260914.html>

On August 25, 2022, Yelena Simonova, judge of the Leninskiy District Court of Saransk, sentenced six Jehovah's Witnesses, including a woman and a father of two young children, to gross terms of imprisonment in a penal colony just because of their religion.

The prosecutor requested 2.5 years in a penal colony for Shevchuk, Antonov and Korolev, 4 years and 2 months for the Nikulins, and 6.5 years for Atryakhin. Despite the absence of victims in the case, the court assigned real terms of imprisonment to all believers: for **Vladimir Atryakhin—6 years, for Georgiy Nikulin and his wife Yelena—4 years and 2 months each, for Aleksandr Shevchuk, Aleksandr Korolev and Denis Antonov—2 years each.** The believers were taken into custody in the courtroom.

[Continue reading...](#)

25.08.2022 - Jehovah's Witnesses searched in Sevastopol

Sova center - On August 24, 2022, at least three homes of Jehovah's Witnesses were searched in Sevastopol and Yevpatoriya, and a criminal case was initiated under Part 1 of Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code (organization of the activities of an extremist organization).

Two believers, 53-year-old Viktor Kudinov and 51-year-old Sergei Zhigalov, were detained; on August 26, the court was to choose a measure of restraint for them. Earlier, Zhigalov and his wife were witnesses in the criminal case of Jehovah's Witness Viktor Stashevsky who in March 2021, he was sentenced to six and a half years in prison under Part 1 of Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code.

[Continue reading...](#)

23.08.2022 - Supporters of Tablighi Jamaat sentenced in Ulyanovsk

Sova Center - On August 23, 2022, it became known that the Nikolaevsky District Court of the Ulyanovsk Region found four local residents - M. Rafikov, S. Salkin, A. Shabanov and M. Sadykov - guilty of CC. 1 and 2 Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code (organization of the activities of an extremist organization and participation in it).

According to information published in the media with reference to the FSB, they were sentenced to terms ranging from two years and eight months to six years and two months of suspended imprisonment. According to law enforcers, 59-year-old Rafikov "held secret meetings, coordinated preaching trips to mosques in other regions of Russia to indoctrinate and involve Muslims in extremist activities," he was convicted under the first part of the article. The rest were found guilty under Part 2 of Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code.

[Continue reading...](#)

20.08.2022 - Western publication doubts pope and patriarch can end war

Link to full text in Russian: <https://cutt.ly/0Cjq4dv>

In Russia now every religious community is feeling the new line of the Kremlin with regard to faith, the Economist posits. Patriarch Kirill, the head of the Russian Orthodox Church, repeats official justifications for the war and puts forth his own. The head of the Department of External Church Relations of the RPTs, Metropolitan Ilarion, who received education in the West, refrained from active support of the war and in June 2022 was suddenly demoted and sent to Budapest as bishop.

The former chief rabbi of Moscow, Pinchas Goldshmidt, who recently left the country, says that now it is impossible to maintain "proper but distant" relations with the authorities, like before the war. Now clergy of all denominations say that they must support the invasion.

[Continue reading...](#)

19.08.2022 - Three Jehovah's Witnesses arrested in Novocherkassk

Sova Center - On August 11, 2022, ten homes of Jehovah's Witnesses were searched in Novocherkassk. **55-year-old Garegin Khachaturyan, 35-year-old Gevorg Yeritsyan and 66-year-old Lyubov Galitsyna** were detained, the court took them into custody for two months. Galitsyna was charged under Part 2 of Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code (participation in the activities of an extremist organization).

There is no information about what charges were brought against Khachaturian and Yeritsyan.

[Continue reading...](#)

18.08.2022 - Former confessor of Sredneuralsky Monastery sentenced to 3.5 years in prison

Sova Center - On November 30, 2021, the Izmailovsky Court of Moscow passed a sentence on the former shiigumen Sergiy (Romanov). The court found him guilty under Part 1 of Art. 330 (arbitrariness), part 3 of Art. 148 (violation of the right to freedom of religion), paras. "c", "d" part 3 of Art. 110.1 (inducement to commit suicide) of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation.

According to the investigation and the court, Romanov prevented the conduct of religious rites and inventory of monastic property, called on the nuns of the monastery to commit suicide, and also published calls for suicide on the Internet.

[Continue reading...](#)

17.08.2022 - The prosecutor's office demands terms of 15 to 17 years in prison for five Crimean Tatars

Sova Center - On August 16, 2022, during the debate in the Southern District Military Court, a representative of the prosecutor's office demanded that Enver Ametov, Ruslan Suleymanov, Yashar Muedinov, Rustem Sheykhaliyev and Osman Arifmemetov be sentenced to long terms of imprisonment, who are charged under Part 2 of Art. 205.2 of the Criminal Code (participation in the activities of a terrorist organization) and Part 1 of Art. 30, art. 278 of the Criminal Code (preparation for a violent seizure of power).

According to investigators, all of them are involved in the activities of Hizb ut-Tahrir, a radical Islamic party that is recognized as a terrorist organization in Russia. For Ametov and Suleymanov, the prosecutor asks for 16 years in a strict regime colony, for Muedinov - 15, for Arifmemetov - 16 and a half, for Sheykhaliyev - 17. In addition, the prosecution demands that Sheykhaliyev be sentenced to a year and a half of restriction of freedom, and to everyone else - a year.

[Continue reading...](#)

16.08.2022 - In Moscow, a Pentecostal pastor was taken into custody on charges of organizing the activities of an undesirable organization

Sova Center - On August 15, 2022, the Basmanny Court of Moscow took into custody until September 30 the pastor of the Church of Evangelical Christians (Pentecostals) "Christ the Savior" **Nikolai Ulitin**, accused under Part 3 of Art. 284.1 of the Criminal Code (organization of the activities of a foreign or international non-governmental organization, in respect of which a decision has been made to recognize its activities as undesirable on the territory of the Russian Federation).

Recall that in several regions in the churches of the "New Generation" searches were carried out as part of the case under this article.

[Continue reading...](#)

16.08.2022 - Three years after the mass raid on Jehovah's Witnesses, searches were again held in the Bryansk Region. Criminal case was initiated.

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2022/08/161430.html>

On August 11, 2022, in Trubchevsk and Unecha, two cities in the Bryansk Region, searches were carried out at the homes of Jehovah's Witnesses. Some of them were already invaded by the security forces in 2019.

The raid, conducted by officers Center for Combating Extremism (CPE) and the Investigative Committee, took place at least at four addresses. Electronic devices, personal records and friendly letters were confiscated from believers. During subsequent interrogation in the Investigative Committee, citizens used the 51st article of the Constitution of the Russian Federation.

[Continue reading...](#)

Putin has a new great data base of religious (and non-religious) “extremists”

Both books or pamphlets and individuals will be included in a mammoth Orwellian list of targets for exclusion and repression.

By Massimo Introvigne

Bitter Winter (26.08.2022) - <https://bit.ly/3cqc10Q> - On July 14, 2022, Vladimir Putin signed a new Russian law on the creation of an “Information database of extremist materials.” The document provides for the creation of a state information system to “ensure operational-search activities and investigative actions carried out as part of countering extremist activity, and organizing preventive measures aimed at preventing it.”

Lists of extremist materials already exist in Russia, and include the publications of the Jehovah’s Witnesses and other religious minorities, as well as brochures critical of the Russian Orthodox Church and the government. The creation of a national data base kept at the Ministry of Justice should make it easier to crack down on such publications nationally.

The law goes beyond written material, though, and extends to persons. It calls for “a unified register of information about persons involved in the activities of an extremist or terrorist organization.” The list should include everybody “who was a founder, member of a collegial governing body, head, deputy head, head of a regional or other structural unit, deputy head of a regional or other structural unit, participant, member, employee of an extremist or terrorist organization.” It is stated that these “extremists” may not be candidates in any Russian election, but obviously the list will be used for other purposes too.

Any “participant” or “member” in organizations declared “extremist,” including the Jehovah’s Witnesses and several pro-democracy group, will be included in the national list.

Russian law regards as “extremists” not only organizations that practice or advocate for violence. It is enough to promote “anti-social” discourses and, [in the religious field](#), to advocate for the “superiority” of a religion with respect to others, which in practice means trying to convert members of the Russian Orthodox Church and other “traditional” religions.

Photo: *Putin with Patriarch Kirill of the Russian Orthodox Church.* [Credits](#).

Government pressure on religious leaders to support Ukraine war

Victoria Arnold

Forum 18 (02.08.2022) - https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2763 - The government has pressured religious leaders to support Russia's renewed invasion of Ukraine, and prosecuted and fined religious believers and leaders who publicly oppose the war. Lutheran Bishop Dietrich Brauer and Moscow Chief Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt left Russia in March after resisting state pressure to support the war. The FSB security service warned local religious leaders, including at least three Protestant pastors individually in one region. "Such warnings don't take place now," a pastor told Forum 18 in July. "Those [March warnings] were enough for everyone."

Russia's government has used a range of tactics to pressure religious leaders into supporting Vladimir Putin's renewed invasion of Ukraine from 24 February. These tactics include warnings to senior and local religious leaders, and prosecuting and fining religious believers and clergy who have publicly opposed the war. It is unclear what effect this has had on religious believers who may have considered making a public protest against the war. Similar warnings and prosecutions have been used against many Russians who express opposition to the war for any reason.



Pinchas Goldschmidt, 7 January 2016 - Qwaszxqwaszxqwaszx [CC BY-SA 4.0]

Two senior religious leaders – both of whom felt they had to leave Russia - have stated that they and other religious leaders came under pressure not to discuss or condemn Russia's renewed war against Ukraine. Lutheran Bishop Dietrich Brauer, who left Russia for Germany in March, said that, at the start of the war, President Putin's administration made "a clear demand" of religious leaders to speak out in favour of the invasion (see below).

The Chief Rabbi of Moscow Pinchas Goldschmidt, who is now in Israel, also left Russia under pressure in March because of his opposition to the war. "As the terrible war against Ukraine unfolded over the last few months, I could not remain silent, viewing so much human suffering," he said on Twitter on 7 July. "As time progressed, it became clear that the Jewish community of Moscow would be endangered by me remaining in my position" (see below).

In March, as Russia's war against Ukraine was intensifying, the FSB security service warned local religious leaders not to publicly oppose the war. In one region, a Protestant pastor noted, at least three fellow pastors received such individual warnings. "Such warnings don't take place now," the pastor told Forum 18 on 15 July. "Those [March warnings] were enough for everyone" (see below).

Other religious figures - including Patriarch Kirill of the Moscow Patriarchate, Mufti Talgat Tadzhuddin of the Central Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Russia, Old Believer Metropolitan Kornily, and Bishop Sergey Ryakhovsky of the Pentecostal Union - [have supported Russia's war against Ukraine](#).

While many religious organisations in Russia still support the invasion of Ukraine, small numbers of laypeople and clergy continue to protest from an explicitly religious perspective. Like thousands of other Russians who every day [voice their opposition to the war in public spaces and online, they are soon detained by police and frequently prosecuted and fined](#).

Many of the religious believers who have opposed the war have been Russian Orthodox, both of the Moscow Patriarchate and other branches. Like Lutheran Bishop Brauer and Chief Rabbi of Moscow Goldschmidt, some have had to leave Russia because they oppose the war (see below).

One priest, Fr Ioann Kurmoyarov of St Petersburg, posted videos criticising Russia's invasion of Ukraine from a Christian perspective. He was arrested on 7 June, and is being held in St Petersburg's Kresty prison awaiting trial for the new criminal offence of disseminating "knowingly false information" about the military. On 28 July, the city's Kalinin District Court ordered that Fr Ioann should be kept in custody for another month (see below).

Darya Lebedeva, head of the joint court system press service for St Petersburg, insisted to Forum 18 that Fr Ioann had to be held in detention because, "if at liberty and not isolated from society, Kurmoyarov may continue his criminal activity, conceal himself from investigators and the court, destroy evidence and otherwise interfere with the criminal proceedings" (see below).

On 3 July, Galina Borisova, an actor and a parishioner of the Catholic Church of St Louis, Moscow, pinned a piece of paper to the church's Russian flag. The paper read "No bellum" and "There is no place for the flag of an aggressor state beside the flag of the Holy See". A nun removed the paper after a few minutes, by which time about 50 people had already seen it. On 1 August police registered a case against her at Moscow's Meshchansky District Court under Administrative Code Article 20.3.3 ("Public actions aimed at discrediting the use of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation") (see below).

The Russian authorities also continue to block online access to information about the war in Ukraine, and have also banned many foreign citizens from entering the country. Some of the blocked websites and banned foreign citizens are explicitly religious (see below).

Senior religious leaders pressured to support war



Bishop Dietrich Brauer, 14 April 2013 - Bischof Brauer [[CC BY-SA 3.0](#)]

Bishop Dietrich Brauer, who left Russia in March and moved to Germany, resigned as head of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Russia on 1 June. The Church Synod replaced him as Archbishop by his former deputy, Vladimir Provorov, and appointed Brauer Archbishop-Emeritus. He continues to hold the position of Bishop of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church of European Russia, to which he was elected in 2011.

"The Presidential Administration made a clear demand of all religious leaders to speak out and support the war," Bishop Brauer [stated in a March interview for Württemberg Diocese](#). "We were not allowed to talk about the war, pray for peace, or contact our Ukrainian brothers and sisters." Brauer gave a sermon in Moscow's Cathedral of St Peter and St Paul on 27 February, which consisted of [thinly veiled criticism of the war](#). He left Russia for Germany shortly afterwards and sees no possibility of return in the near future.

In an [interview with "Die Kirche"](#) (a weekly church newspaper in Berlin and Brandenburg) on 14 April, Brauer said: "We are witnessing the blackmail of religion. But we shouldn't abandon the truth of the gospel, because then we have no future." He also noted that prayers in Russian churches cannot specify "that we have in mind the people in Ukraine, the images and horrors of the war".

On 18 May, President Vladimir Putin removed Brauer from the Presidential Council for Cooperation with Religious Associations.

It now appears that a second senior religious leader left Russia after the invasion because of pressure from state authorities to support the war in Ukraine. Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt, Chief Rabbi of Moscow, travelled to Hungary in March and has now settled in Israel after spending time in Eastern Europe. His daughter-in-law Avital Chizhik-Goldschmidt, a New York-based journalist, wrote on Twitter on 7 June that the Rabbi and his wife Dara Goldschmidt had been "put under pressure by the authorities to publicly support the 'special military operation' – and refused".

"As the terrible war against Ukraine unfolded over the last few months, I could not remain silent, viewing so much human suffering. I went to assist the refugees in Eastern Europe and spoke out against the war," Goldschmidt said in a statement on Twitter on 7 July. "As time progressed, despite re-electing me to the position of Chief Rabbi last month, it became clear that the Jewish community of Moscow would be endangered by me remaining in my position. Sad as I am, in the circumstances, it is clearly in the interest of the future of the community that I now leave my post."

In March, as Russia's war against Ukraine was intensifying, the FSB security service [warned local religious leaders not to publicly oppose the war](#). In one region, a Protestant pastor noted, at least three fellow pastors received such individual warnings. "Such warnings don't take place now," the pastor told Forum 18 on 15 July. "Those [March warnings] were enough for everyone."

Forum 18 wrote to the federal Human Rights Ombudsperson's Office in Moscow on 28 July to ask whether the state authorities had put pressure on religious leaders to support the so-called "special military operation" and, if so, why and in what way. Forum 18 received no reply by the end of the working day in Moscow on 2 August.

Orthodox opposition to war



Fr Ioann Burdin - Marina Muratova [[CC BY-NC-ND 4.0](#)]

Many of the religious believers who have opposed the war have been Russian Orthodox, both of the Moscow Patriarchate and other branches.

On 10 March, [fined Fr Ioann Burdin of the Moscow Patriarchate's Kostroma Diocese](#) one month's average local wages for online remarks and a Sunday sermon in church condemning Russia's invasion of Ukraine and stressing the importance of the commandment, "Thou shalt not kill". The court decision is "a ban not only on expressing one's opinion but also even on professing one's religious beliefs", Fr Ioann told Forum 18. He has appealed against the fine "[so that life is not a bed of roses for the authorities and judges](#)".

In early April, a court fined Deacon Sergey Shcherbyuk nearly one month's average local wages for allegedly "discrediting the Russian armed forces" in [conversations with parishioners and colleagues](#). He was accused of talking with one parishioner about Ukrainian civilian deaths and expressing the opinion that everything could have been resolved without military hostilities. He was also accused of asking a church worker edit a post she had made in the parish VKontakte group, which asked people to "pray for the soldiers fighting the Nazis and Bandera".

In early April, Fr Nikolay Platonov, a parish priest from Chelyabinsk Metropolitanate (Moscow Patriarchate), requested to be made supernumerary (pochislit za shtat, meaning that he remains a priest but is not formally employed in a parish, cathedral, or other institution) because, as he said in a video explaining his decision, "I can't be silent any longer". He had in a video strongly criticised Patriarch Kirill and Vladimir Putin for the war, [and stated](#): "After [this video], our church hierarchy will inevitably want to get rid of me with some shameful [legal] article. When a priest of the Russian Orthodox Church starts to speak the truth, he immediately automatically becomes a paedophile, or a thief, or a drug addict."

Fr Nikolay was among nearly 300 Russian Orthodox priests to sign an [open letter calling for "reconciliation and an immediate ceasefire" in Ukraine](#). The letter criticised the suppression of protests against the war, and stated that "we believe that the people of Ukraine should make their choice on their own, not at gunpoint, without pressure from West or East".

Another priest who signed the open letter, Fr Sergey Titkov, also requested to be made supernumerary (*pochislit za shtat*) on 30 March "for health reasons", according to his letter to Ryazan Diocese, which he posted on his Facebook and VKontakte pages. His bishop Metropolitan Mark of Ryazan and Mikhailov had on 29 March demanded explanations for his [refusal to pray a prayer issued by Metropolitan Kirill](#) praying among other things that God "thwart the intentions of foreigners who want to take up arms against Holy Russia". On 30 March Metropolitan Mark also demanded a written explanation of Fr Sergey's posts on his VKontakte page condemning the war in Ukraine.

"Whether there was pressure on the bishop from the authorities, I don't know," Fr Sergey [told Forum 18 on 7 May](#). Had he not stepped down as he did, he believes the diocese would have transferred him to another church where the senior priest would report to the bishop on his conduct, "that I didn't read the new 'Prayer for Peace', and so on", or "to live in some monastery as a reader, which I would have refused. That is, they would have rattled my nerves, and other people's, and it would all have ended the same way. I wanted it over as soon as possible, and not to have it turn into a circus."

In 2019, Fr Sergey was also among Russian Orthodox (Moscow Patriarchate) priests who signed an [open letter in defence of people arrested during protests in Moscow](#) against the authorities' refusal to register opposition candidates for local elections.

Similarly, Deacon Dmitry Bayev wrote to the Vyatka Diocese on 25 February, [asking to be made supernumerary \(*pochislit za shtat*\)](#) until "the situation is settled". He explained that "as a Christian holding the rank of deacon", he could not participate in services at which prayers were offered for the government and armed forces. He posted the letter to social media on the same day. The Diocese then banned him from serving, and the Investigative Committee opened a case against him on 23 March under [Criminal Code Article 207.3, Part 2, Paragraph d](#) ("Public dissemination of knowingly false information about the use of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation based on political, ideological, racial, national or religious hatred or enmity, or based on hatred or enmity against any social group").

Bayev is now outside Russia, he told Idel Realii on 12 April, and does not intend to return, "because I was given to understand that as soon as I cross the border in the opposite direction, they will immediately 'take me in'".

Forum 18 wrote to the Moscow Patriarchate's legal department in Moscow on 28 July to ask what the Patriarchate is doing to support believers who are prosecuted for voicing their opinions on events in Ukraine, and whether state authorities have requested that dioceses put pressure on clergy not to speak out, or whether dioceses have acted on their own initiative. Forum 18 received no reply by the end of the working day in Moscow on 2 August.

Non-Moscow Patriarchate Orthodox priests opposing war



Fr Ioann Kurmoyarov - Ahilla.ru

Fr Ioann Kurmoyarov of St Petersburg posted videos on his YouTube channel criticising Russia's invasion of Ukraine from a Christian perspective. He argued that "those who have unleashed aggression will not be in heaven" and "if you are not disturbed by what is going on in Ukraine, this outrage, then .. you are not Christians".

Fr Ioann belongs to the branch of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia (ROCOR) which did not join other parts of ROCOR when they joined the Moscow Patriarchate in 2007.

Fr Ioann was arrested on 7 June, and is now in St Petersburg's Kresty prison awaiting trial for the new criminal offence of disseminating "knowingly false information" about the military. St Petersburg Investigative Committee has not responded to Forum 18's questions. "He is aware that he may be sentenced to a long term of imprisonment – up to 10 years – but he does not intend to deviate from his convictions," says his lawyer Leonid Krikun.

St Petersburg City Court upheld Fr Ioann's initial detention order on 20 July. The Support for Political Prisoners, Memorial human rights group announced on 27 July that it considers Fr Ioann a political prisoner.

On 28 July, the city's Kalinin District Court ordered that Fr Ioann should be kept in custody for another month.

Forum 18 sent a request for information via the St Petersburg Investigative Committee's website on 5 July, including the questions:

- why the expression of religious views on war in general and in Ukraine was considered distribution of false information about the Russian Armed Forces;

- and why it was deemed necessary to put him in detention.

Forum 18 had received no reply by the end of the working day in St Petersburg of 2 August.

"The [district] court took into account that Kurmoyarov is accused of committing a serious crime against public security, which may be punished by a period of imprisonment significantly



exceeding three years," Darya Lebedeva, head of the joint court system press service for St Petersburg, told Forum 18 on 2 August.

Other grounds for his detention included the fact that Kurmoyarov has relatives abroad, including in Ukraine, that he had previously planned to leave Russia because of his dispute with the Moscow Patriarchate, and that he is a member of a Ukrainian-based branch of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia (ROCOR) which is not part of the Moscow Patriarchate.



Fr Nikandr Pinchuk - Fr Nikandr Pinchuk [[CC BY-NC-ND 4.0](#)]

This "taken together, gives reason to suppose that, if at liberty and not isolated from society, Kurmoyarov may continue his criminal activity, conceal himself from investigators and the court, destroy evidence and otherwise interfere with the criminal proceedings", Lebedeva added. "The court of appeal agreed with these conclusions."

Fr Nikandr Pinchuk, rector of the parish of St. Simeon Verkhotursky in Verkhoturye, Sverdlovsk Region, had written about the "violation of the Holy Commandments by those who should preach those commandments .. [and] about demons and antichrists among the Russian authorities". Russia's attack on Ukraine is "a mortal sin", he [added to Forum 18](#).

Fr Pinchuk also belongs to the branch of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia (ROCOR) which did not join other parts of ROCOR when they joined the Moscow Patriarchate in 2007.

Fr Pinchuk is under investigation under [Criminal Code Article 280.3](#), which punishes a repeat offence of "discrediting" the Armed Forces. "But I have committed no crime," Fr Pinchuk said. "[I am a priest and have the right to denounce evil](#), regardless of who is involved and the political situation." He remains a suspect and has not been arrested.

Administrative and criminal punishments for opposing war

New punishments for criticising Russia's actions in its war against Ukraine entered legal force as soon as President Vladimir Putin signed them into law on 4 March.

These punishments are contained in:

- [Administrative Code Article 20.3.3](#) ("Public actions aimed at discrediting the use of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation"), which is used against apparently any form of anti-war statements either in public spaces or online;
- [Criminal Code Article 207.3](#) ("Public dissemination, under the guise of credible statements, of knowingly false information on the use of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation");
- and [Criminal Code Article 280.3](#) ("Public actions aimed at discrediting the use of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation in order to protect the interests of the Russian Federation and its citizens, [and] maintain international peace and security, including public calls to prevent the use of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation for these purposes, or equally, aimed at discrediting the exercise by state bodies of the Russian Federation of their powers outside the territory of the Russian Federation for these purposes").

If an individual commits an offence covered by Administrative Code Article 20.3.3 more than once within a year, they may be prosecuted under the corresponding Criminal Code Article 280.3.

Administrative and criminal cases brought for opposing war

Since early March, people have been prosecuted for posters or social media posts quoting rap lyrics, the Russian Constitution, and even Putin's own speeches. Police initiated two recent cases for using quotation marks around the phrase "special military operation" and for using a sad emoji and thumbs-up sign on anti-war posts on the Odnoklassniki social network.

Between 24 February and 20 July, there were 16,380 detentions of people protesting against the war in Ukraine, OVD-Info reported on 22 July: "Since 24 February in Russia and annexed Crimea, protest against the war in Ukraine has not stopped. Mass demonstrations have quietened down, but news of detentions for pickets, publications on the internet, and other expressions of protest are coming in every day."

Police initiated 3,303 cases under Administrative Code Article 20.3.3 between 5 March and 14 July (on average, 35 every working day), according to Interior Ministry documents shared by the Net Freedoms Project (Seteviye Svobody) on its Telegram channel.

For example, police detained artist and activist Ivan Lyubimov in Yekaterinburg on 28 July for a religiously themed poster displaying UN-calculated civilian casualty figures for Ukraine. His poster depicted a dead Jesus apparently being cradled by the Virgin Mary, with a tree (perhaps evoking the "tree of life .. for the healing of the nations" from the Book of Revelation) growing out of the wound in his side – several of its branches end in the names and coats of arms of the Ukrainian towns of Odessa, Bucha, Vinnytsia, Chasiv Yar, Kharkiv, and Mariupol. Underneath is a quotation from Luke 20:38 – "Now he is God not of the dead, but of the living; for to him all of them are alive". Above this is the statement: "Since 24 February in Ukraine 12,272 civilians have become victims of the war".

Lyubimov, who has been detained for [similar protests on several previous occasions](#), told OVD-Info that he had been charged under [Administrative Code Article 20.3.3](#).

Many other protestors against the war have also used explicitly religious imagery.

On 3 July, Galina Borisova, an actor and a parishioner of the Catholic Church of St Louis, Moscow, pinned a piece of paper to the church's Russian flag. The paper read "No bellum" and "There is no place for the flag of an aggressor state beside the flag of the Holy See". A nun removed the paper after a few minutes, by which time about 50 people had already seen it, according to posts on the parish Facebook group.

Borisova's action was picked up on municipal CCTV and she was identified by facial recognition technology, she explained on 21 July in the Facebook group. On 1 August, police registered a case against her at Moscow's Meshchansky District Court under Administrative Code Article 20.3.3.

Aleksandr Ivanov, editor of the open Orthodox encyclopaedia drevo-info.ru, was fined 45,000 Roubles on 29 July at Kaluga District Court. He had been charged under Administrative Code Article 20.3.3 for posting an anti-war statement on the encyclopaedia's homepage.

Forum 18 wrote to Kaluga Region Interior Ministry on 13 July to ask why Ivanov's statement made before Administrative Code Article 20.3.3 entered legal force was considered grounds for prosecution, and why the expression of a position on events in Ukraine and war in general was deemed to "discredit" the Russian Armed Forces. Forum 18 received no response by the end of the working day in Kaluga on 2 August.



Nina Belyayeva [Nina Belyayeva \[CC BY-NC-ND 4.0\]](#)

Ivanov intends to appeal, he noted in a post on drevo-info.ru on 30 July: "Most of all I don't like lies. If the law expressly forbade criticising Putin's actions, I would understand the charge. If the law explicitly prohibited the word 'war', there would be no questions. But how can one discredit the goals and tasks of the army without saying a word about these goals and tasks? The rule of law, under which Russia considers itself to be, must operate according to the rules, and not according to concepts."

According to the Black February Telegram channel, investigators opened 72 cases under [Criminal Code Article 207.3](#) and 6 cases under [Criminal Code Article 280.3](#) between 4 March and 25 July.

The Criminal Code Article 280.3 cases include Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia (ROCOR) priest Fr Nikandr Pinchuk from Verkhoturye in Sverdlovsk Region (see above).

So far, Criminal Code Article 207.3 is known to have been used against two people for explicitly religious opposition to the war:

- Nina Belyayeva, a Baptist and Communist municipal deputy from Voronezh Region. During a meeting of Semiluk District Council she [called Russia's invasion a war crime](#). Belyayeva had to raise her voice and repeat herself over the shouting of her fellow deputies: "A Christian is not someone who wears a cross, but someone who follows Christ, for whom the word of God – the authority of Christ – is much higher than the authority of the President .. for a Christian, first of all, the authority of Christ is higher than the opinion of the Patriarch, and if a person obscures Christ with somebody else, then they cannot be a Christian." By the time the case was opened in early April, she had already fled Russia;
- and ROCOR Orthodox priest Fr Ioann Kurnoyarov who has been in pre-trial detention since 7 June (see above).

Website blocking

Since Russia's renewed invasion of Ukraine, media watchdog Roskomnadzor has blocked access to over 3,000 websites for reasons of "military censorship", according to a 13 July report by digital rights organisation Roskomsvoboda. These include foreign media outlets (such as Radio Free Europe, the BBC, and Deutsche Welle), Russian independent media (Meduza, Mediazona, People of Baykal), and human rights organisations (Human Rights Watch), as well as social networks.

On 24 May, at the request of the General Prosecutor's Office, Roskomnadzor blocked access to all of the foreign Protestant website InVictory.org. It had previously blocked three pages on the site:

- on 1 April, an [appeal to Russian Christians by a Ukrainian Baptist pastor](#);
- and on 24 May, two articles from [11 March](#) and [14 March](#) about deaths and detentions among Protestant civilians in Mariupol.

On 31 May, also at the request of the General Prosecutor's Office, Roskomnadzor [blocked the entire Public Orthodoxy website](#) (publicorthodoxy.org). This is run by the Orthodox Christian Studies Centre at Fordham University in New York. The website has published numerous articles criticising the Moscow Patriarchate's endorsement of the war in Ukraine and Patriarch Kirill's favoured concept of "Russky Mir" ("Russian World"). This concept claims that Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus all constitute a single spiritual and cultural space which is supposedly in opposition to the liberal and secular West.

Portal Credo, a religious news website, has gone offline of its own accord after receiving a warning from Roskomnadzor on 22 March, apparently for its coverage of the war in Ukraine. "It remains unclear how it is technically possible to bring the content of the Portal in line with the

requirements of [the new law on disseminating 'false information']," editor Aleksandr Soldatov wrote on Facebook on 23 March.

"On the one hand, we can set ourselves the task of limiting publications to 'abstractly religious' topics that do not concern catastrophic events and processes unfolding in the world, as some Russian publications do. On the other hand, such a position, in our opinion, is incompatible with the tasks and meaning of professional journalism and is unlikely to be accepted by our readers. In addition, our civic position is that the Portal has no right – even by means of silence – to justify obvious crimes against humanity."

Founded in 2002, Portal Credo published news and analytical articles on religion in Russia and abroad and was often critical of the Moscow Patriarchate.

Entry bans

Since Russia's renewed invasion of Ukraine on 24 February, the Russian Foreign Ministry has banned a large number of foreign citizens from entering Russia. The Foreign Ministry continues to add more people to its entry ban list, placing them under what it describes as "personal sanctions, including a ban on entering the Russian Federation".

On 21 May, Russia put many foreign citizens on its entry ban list, including three senior figures in Agudas Chasidei Chabad, the umbrella organisation for the Chabad-Lubavitch Hasidic movement. All three are US citizens: Yehuda Chaim Krinsky (Secretary), Baruch Shlomo Eliyahu Cunin (member of the board), and Abraham Isaac Shemtov (President).

The Foreign Ministry also included US lawyer Nathan Lewin on the 21 May entry ban list. He represented the Jewish Chabad-Lubavitch movement in long-running but unsuccessful attempts to pressure the Russian authorities to release about 12,000 books, manuscripts and other artefacts seized from the late Rabbi Yosef Yitzchok Schneersohn. He was the spiritual leader of the Chabad-Lubavitch movement, and was arrested and sentenced to death in 1927 during the Soviet period. After worldwide protests he was allowed to leave Russia in 1927 and he died in 1950. His library was long held by the Lenin Library, later the Russian State Library in Moscow. The Foreign Ministry ban list designates the Chabad-Lubavitch movement lawyer only as "Nathan Levin [sic], lawyer".

Four current and former Commissioners of the US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) were also among those barred on 21 May 2022: Gary Bauer, Gayle Manchin, Anthony Perkins, and Nury Turkel. The Foreign Ministry ban list designates each one with their USCIRF affiliation.

Forum 18 wrote to the Foreign Ministry in Moscow on 28 July to ask why it had banned the Agudas Chasidei Chabad leaders and USCIRF Commissioners from entering Russia. Forum 18 received no reply by the end of the working day in Moscow on 2 August.

Gap widening between the Moscow Patriarchate and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church

HRWF (22.08.2022) – The Ukrainian authorities have allowed Metropolitan Onufry, the head of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church/ Moscow Patriarchate, to meet Russian prisoners of war. He gave them a message to share with their families when they are back home: “Tell them we do not want the war being waged in Ukraine today. It must be stopped, and it can be stopped. We do not want mothers in Ukraine or Russia to meet their dead sons.”

This is however not the message of Patriarch Kirill of the Russian Orthodox Church who prioritizes his condolences in connection with the loss of lives in the road accident in the [Turkish Gaziantep](#) and the explosion of a shopping center in [Yerevan](#)”, choosing to ignore the innumerable Orthodox Ukrainian victims of the Russian shelling in the last six months and to keep silent about President Putin’s war of aggression. Instead, he claims that “all Orthodox Ukrainians are children of the Russian Orthodox Church.”

His Beatitude Onuphry addresses Russian prisoners of war

By Yaroslav Nivkin

Union of Orthodox Journalists (20.08.2022) - <https://bit.ly/3K97Jm> - The UOC Primate received Russian prisoners of war in the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra and urged them to tell their families that the war must be stopped and peace established.

On August 18, 2022, [**His Beatitude Metropolitan Onuphry**](#) received a group of Russian prisoners of war at the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra, who were brought by the initiative and assistance of journalist and blogger Vladimir Zolkin. The video of the meeting was published on Zolkin's [YouTube channel](#).

His Beatitude Onuphry led a prayer service in one of the Lavra churches, after which he addressed the RF prisoners.

"I wish the Lord will return you to your homeland, families so that you can see mothers, sisters, wives, children, brothers, friends. I would like you to tell them the following words: we do not want the war being waged in Ukraine today. We do not want our cities and villages to be destroyed, our people and your people to perish. We do not want mothers in Ukraine or Russia to meet their dead sons and cry bitter, inconsolable tears over them. It must be stopped, and it can be stopped," said His Beatitude Metropolitan Onuphry.

His Beatitude said it is possible to stop the war, but not by the force of arms, not by the force of human truth, but by the force of divine love.

"We need to find a word of love that could silence the guns and stop the rockets. We want peace," the Metropolitan said. "Our Ukrainian Orthodox Church did everything to ensure that the Russian and Ukrainian peoples lived in peace, harmony and love. It turned out the way it did. But even if evil happened, it must be stopped. May the Lord give our rulers the courage, reason, and wisdom to find the word of love that stops all evil. I want to wish that God protects you and all people who are on the battlefield. War is not the means by which unity between peoples and families can be achieved. Violence cannot create unity, unity is created

through love, which is God. The one who prays and fulfills divine commandments is a man of God. May God bless our lands with peace."

"I don't know if you understand it or not, but it shouldn't be like that (participation in the war – Ed.). You can't kill each other. Death brings no benefit to anyone, but only grief to every home. It is a shame that peoples who came out of a single baptismal font should fight each other. And we must do everything to stop this insanity," His Beatitude concluded.

All Orthodox Ukrainians as children of Russian Orthodox Church Patriarch Kirill says

Interfax (28.07.2022) - <http://www.interfax-religion.com/?act=news&div=16647> - Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia has dismissed reproaches that the Russian Orthodox Church exists only for Russians and noted that all Orthodox Ukrainians, including those who have gone into schism, are children of the Russian Orthodox Church.

"Everything that concerns Donbass, the Lugansk Region, the Kharkov Region - those places where people are suffering today - is very disturbing and hurts my heart, because all the Orthodox people who live there are children of the Moscow Patriarchate," the patriarch said at a meeting with children who had come to Moscow from Donbass and Ukraine on Thursday.

"Some acknowledge this, gladly confess and participate in the life of our Church, some have gone down the path of illegal schismatic separation from our Church, but God is the judge of everyone, and for the patriarch, all Orthodox people in Ukraine are his children, those close to his heart," he said.

Photo : Metropolitan Onuphry urged the Russians to stop the war. Photo: screenshot of V. Zolkin's YouTube channel

Ukraine war: Thousands of Jews quit Russia amid fears of persecution

By Aleem Maqbool

BBC News (17.08.2022) - <https://bbc.in/3bZ0BBb> - Russia is facing the mass migration abroad of large numbers of its Jewish population, with at least one in eight leaving the country since its war with Ukraine began.

The Jewish Agency helps Jews around the world move to Israel. It says an astonishing 20,500 of Russia's estimated total of 165,000 Jews have gone since March.

Thousands more have moved to other countries.

Undoubtedly the spectre of historical Jewish persecution has loomed large in the minds of many of those who are a part of this sudden mass migration and those still trying to get out of Russia.

In Moscow, there had been a huge effort to develop the Jewish community since the fall of Communism. Among those at the forefront was Pinchas Goldschmidt, the city's chief rabbi since 1993.

"We started from scratch with synagogues, schools, kindergartens, social services, teachers, rabbis and community members," he says of the vibrancy that was created.

But just two weeks into the war this year, Rabbi Goldschmidt and his family left Russia, first to Hungary and then to Israel.

He then stepped down from his position and spoke out against the war.

"I felt that I had to do something to show my total disassociation and disagreement with this invasion of Ukraine, but I would have endangered myself if I had done that staying in Moscow."

Some Russian Jews criticised him for leaving and speaking out, worried it would mean more scrutiny of the community, but Rabbi Goldschmidt said most were supportive.

"I received some messages saying 'How can you leave us alone?' but I would say the great majority were extremely supportive. It was not a minor conflict to decide whether to go, for me and my wife the community was our lives," he says.

Rabbi Goldschmidt says that it was through staying and speaking out that the community could have been left endangered.

But since then, huge numbers have followed his lead.

Many have taken up the opportunity of going to Israel, where the Law of Return gives anyone who can prove they have at least one Jewish grandparent the right to citizenship. "I have been thinking quite a bit about why there is such a rush to go because we are not seeing a huge surge of anti-Semitism," says Anna Shternshis, Professor of Yiddish studies at Toronto University and specialist in Jewish history in Russia.

"But then putting my historian hat on, I see that every time something happens in Russia, some upheaval, some change, Jews are always in danger."

She describes how Russian historical events led to violence against Jews, such as the revolution, the economic crisis of the late 19th Century and World War Two.

"Not everyone acts on it, but every Jew in Russia today is thinking about this."

Professor Shternshis, was born and raised in Russia herself. She says she feels especially dismayed at the way in which Jews feel, once again in world history, that however much they have committed to building a life somewhere it can suddenly be taken away.

One man we spoke to who is trying to leave felt he was in precisely that position. He wanted to be known by a false name, Alexander, because of fears of the consequences of speaking out given that he is still in Moscow.

"After 24 February, my family realised we were absolutely against this war but we did not know how we could protest. One of my children is the age of military service, so that is another reason we want to go," he says.

The distress in his voice at having to contemplate leaving his home and country is all too clear, and he talks of his fears of not being able to find work abroad and not having huge amounts of savings.

But as Professor Shternshis suggested, Alexander's anxiety about his family's future in Russia goes beyond just opposing the war.

"The authorities in Russia are unpredictable and they have a bad tendency; Jews become one of their propaganda targets, we are traditionally a good way to find internal enemies. My great-grandparents and grandparents suffered from those times," he says.

Alexander says he only knows two other Jewish families and that the community has not been a big part of his life.

But he fears that however integrated he is, this will not matter if the mood against Jews changes.

He has applied for Israeli citizenship and is due to be interviewed in the coming weeks. One of the things that has alarmed Alexander is the Kremlin's stated intention to shut down the Russian arm of the Jewish Agency.

"All of a sudden we see that on the news, and we wonder what is next? We feel very unsafe and we think could we lose our jobs, or go to jail. Things have become very scary."

Photo: Pinchas Goldschmidt, Chief Rabbi of Moscow since 1993, left Russia earlier this year

Special Bimonthly FORB Digest (01–15.08.2022)

15.08.2022 - New registers of "extremist" people and literature

Forum 18 - July legal amendments introduce a new register of people allegedly connected to "extremism", apparently to be used in parallel with the existing Rosfinmonitoring "List of Terrorists and Extremists". Individuals liable for inclusion are so broadly defined that it is unclear whether there may be wider implications, including for religious believers whose organisations have been banned as "extremist", such as Jehovah's Witnesses or Muslim Nursi readers. "Anyone could end up [on the new unified register]," says Aleksandr Verkhovsky of the SOVA Centre in Moscow.

[Continue reading...](#)

15.08.2022 - Savage sentences in Russia's religious persecution and plunder in occupied Crimea

A Russian court of appeal has upheld sentences of up to 18 years against four Crimean Tatars, with the persecution of two of the men almost certainly connected with Russia's attack on an independent religious community in occupied Alushta and plunder of their mosque. The 'appeal hearing' was pure farce, with the Russian prosecutor having clearly not even bothered to read the file material and making entirely false allegations about the four men.

[Continue reading...](#)

15.08.2022 - Case of two Jehovah's Witnesses brought to court in Murmansk Region

Sova Center - On August 12, 2022, the Investigative Department of the Investigative Committee for the Murmansk Region announced the completion of the investigation of the criminal case under Part 1 of Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code (organization of the activities of an extremist organization) in relation to two Jehovah's Witnesses from Snezhnogorsk, the agency does not name their names. The case has been sent to court.

[Continue reading...](#)

15.08.2022 - Sentence to a prisoner who preached the teachings of "Tablighi Jamaat" came into force in the Altai Territory

Sova center - On April 12, 2022, the Rubtsovsky City Court delivered a sentence under Part 2 of Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code and part 1.1 of Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code (participation in an extremist organization and involvement in its activities) to a follower of the banned religious movement Tablighi Jamaat. On August 4, 2022, the verdict was considered by the Altai Regional Court and changed. Taking into account the previous verdict, the court sentenced the accused to a sentence of five years and 20 days in prison to be served in a strict regime correctional colony.

[Continue reading...](#)

14.08.2022 - Searches were carried out in New Generation churches in several regions in connection with a criminal case of cooperation with an undesirable organization

Sova Center - On August 14, 2022, it became known about searches at the homes of members of the New Generation Church, which took place in several regions as part of a criminal case under Art. 284.1 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation (carrying out activities of a foreign or international non-governmental organization, in respect of which a decision has been made to recognize its activities as undesirable on the territory of the Russian Federation).

[Continue reading...](#)

11.08.2022 - Six residents of Dzhankoy district of Crimea detained on suspicion of involvement in Hizb ut-Tahrir

Sova Center - On August 11, 2022, searches were carried out in Dzhankoy and other settlements of the Dzhankoy district of Crimea as part of a criminal case initiated under chch. 1, 2 art. 205.5 of the Criminal Code (organization of the activities of a terrorist organization, participation in it). Six Crimean Tatar activists - Enver Krosh, Vilen Temeryanov, Seytyag Abbozov, Murat Mustafayev, Edem Bekirov and Rinat Aliyev - were detained. On August 12, the Kyiv District Court of Simferopol placed Abbozov under house arrest, while Temeryanov, Krosh, Mustafayev, Bekirov and Aliyev were sent to pre-trial detention.

[Continue reading...](#)

09.08.2022 - A resident of Saratov was sentenced to a real term for participating in Tablighi Jamaat for two days

Sova Center - On August 9, 2022, the Investigative Department of the Investigative Committee for the Saratov Region announced that the court found the local resident guilty under Part 2 of Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code (participation in the activities of an extremist organization) and sentenced him to imprisonment for a period of two years and restriction of freedom for a period of six months.

[Continue reading...](#)

08.08.2022 - Appeal in Stavropol replaced seven and a half years in prison for Konstantin Samsonov with a fine

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2022/08/081523.html>

On August 5, 2022, the Stavropol Regional Court, chaired by Judge Andrey Shever, partially granted the appeal and commuted the sentence, replacing Konstantin Samsonov with 7.5 years in prison for a fine. The believer is expected to be released on August 8.

According to preliminary information the court also partially satisfied the prosecutor's appeal, increasing the amount of fines for other defendants in the case—Aleksandr Akopov and Shamil Sultanov. Taking into account the period of detention in a pre-trial detention center, all three believers were fined, payable: Sultanov and Akopov—250,000 rubles each, and Samsonov—400,000 rubles.

[Continue reading...](#)

04.08.2022 - Court sentences 10 Hizb ut-Tahrir supporters to 11 to 18 years

On August 4, 2022, the Central District Military Court found ten supporters of the radical Islamic party Hizb ut-Tahrir, which is recognized as a terrorist organization in Russia, guilty of CC. 1 and 2 Art. 205.5 of the Criminal Code (organization of the activities of a terrorist organization and participation in it). Marat Saibatalov and Alim Timkanov, who were charged under Part 1 of Art. 205.5 of the Criminal Code, sentenced to 17 and 18 years in prison

respectively, both will spend the first six years in prison. Eight other defendants - Damir Abdrafikov, Ruslan Bariev, Rafis Idrisov, Farrukh Makhkamov, Shakhboz Makhmudov, Turatbek Osmankulov, Aidar Tashbulatov, Ruslan Fomin - were charged under part 2 of the same article. The court sentenced Bariev to 14 years in prison, Abdrafikov and Fomin - 12, Tashbulatov and Makhmudov - 13, Makhkamov, Idrisov and Osmankulov - 11. All those convicted under Part 2 of Art. 205.5 of the Criminal Code will spend the first five years of imprisonment in prison.

[Continue reading...](#)

04.08.2022 - The prosecutor's office seeks a ban on the activities of the Alla-Ayat religious group in the Altai Territory

Sova Center - In July 2022, it became known that on June 15, the prosecutor's office of the Altai Territory filed a lawsuit with the Altai Regional Court to ban the activities of the religious group "Allya-Ayat" ("Elle-Ayat") in the territory of the region.

The plaintiff believes that the methods of treatment used by the followers of the Alla-Ayat teaching - the use of special tea, the pronunciation of the "formula of life", the appeal to the energy of the sun - *"represent a potential danger to human health"* and lead *"to the refusal of citizens from official medical care"*, and consequently, *"the activity of the Alla-Ayat religious group violates the rights of citizens in the field of health care and the provision of state guarantees related to these rights . "*

[Continue reading...](#)

04.08.2022 - Possibility of pope's meeting with Moscow patriarch in September raised

Link to full text in Russian: <https://irp.news/vstrecha-glav-vneshnih-vedomstv-vatikana-i-rpc/>

On 4 August 2022, a meeting was held in the Apostolic Palace in the Vatican between the chairman of the Department for External Church Relations [OVTsS] of the Moscow patriarchate, Metropolitan of Volokolamsk Antony, and the secretary of the Holy See for Relations with States, Archbishop Paul Richard Gallagher, the OVTsS reports.

During the prolonged conversation, current issues pertaining to relations of the Russian Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches were discussed.

As the OVTsS remarks, Metropolitan Antony is now in Rome for an archpastoral visit regarding the administration of parishes of the Russian Orthodox Church in Italy.

[Continue reading...](#)

03.08.2022 - Priest of Moscow church in Ukraine aided Russian aggressors

Link to full text in Russian: <https://religionpravda.com.ua/?p=83161>

The Konotop district prosecutor's office sent to a court an indictment against the rector of a UPTsMP [Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate] church in Konotop district, who delivered material resources to military formations of the aggressor state; he also considers the armed aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine to be legal.

This was reported by the Sumy oblast prosecutor's office.

According to information of the investigation, at the time of the occupation of Konotop district, the priest collected from parishioners food stuffs, which he delivered to representatives of military formations of the aggressor country. In addition, he permitted Russian soldiers to use his personal automobile for travel around the territory of the village.

[Continue reading...](#)

02.08.2022 - Appeal in Nizhny Novgorod approved the conviction of Kirill Yevstigneев for his faith

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2022/08/020835.html>

On August 1, 2022, the Nizhny Novgorod Regional Court, presided over by Judge Olga Yaroshenko, upheld the sentence handed down to one of Jehovah's Witnesses Kirill Yevstigneev, 42—3 years' suspended imprisonment for his belief in Jehovah God.

Addressing the court, the believer emphasized: "I am a Jehovah's Witness and therefore I will never plan to commit extremist acts, or approve or support other people

[Continue reading...](#)

02.08.2022 - Government pressure on religious leaders to support Ukraine war

Forum 18 - The government has pressured religious leaders to support Russia's renewed invasion of Ukraine, and prosecuted and fined religious believers and leaders who publicly oppose the war. Lutheran Bishop Dietrich Brauer and Moscow Chief Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt left Russia in March after resisting state pressure to support the war. The FSB security service warned local religious leaders, including at least three Protestant pastors individually in one region. "Such warnings don't take place now," a pastor told Forum 18 in July. "Those [March warnings] were enough for everyone."

[Continue reading...](#)

Protestant churches targeted by repression

Churches of the "New Generation" were searched in several regions in a criminal case involving alleged cooperation with an undesirable organization

Sova Center (15.08.2022) - <https://bit.ly/3pnjgts> - On August 14, 2022, it became known about searches of members of the New Generation Church, which took place in several regions as part of a criminal case under Art. 284.1 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation (implementation of activities of a foreign or international non-governmental organization in respect of which a decision has been made to declare its activities undesirable on the territory of the Russian Federation).

In particular, the searches took place in Moscow, Kemerovo, Novosibirsk, Chelyabinsk, Sochi and Krasnodar.

During the searches, religious literature and computer equipment were seized.

According to Kemerovo pastor Andrei Matyuzhov, at least two people have been detained.

RIA Novosti published a video in which the searching security forces put the owner of the house on the floor face down, while scaring his child.

Many media, reporting on searches, call the "New Generation" a "sect" that supports the Ukrainian battalion "Azov" banned in Russia.

Recall that in 2021, the Prosecutor General's Office recognized the activities of four New Generation organizations based in Latvia and Ukraine as undesirable on the territory of the Russian Federation. In December 2021, the security forces disrupted the pastoral conference organized by the Russian Pentecostals in Ramenskoye, after which many of its participants were prosecuted under Art. 20.33 of the Administrative Code of the Russian Federation (participation in the activities of a foreign or international non-governmental organization in respect of which a decision has been made to declare its activities undesirable on the territory of the Russian Federation).

HRWF Comment

The crackdown on "New Generation" Evangelical Churches is being instrumentalised by the Russian media supporting Putin's policy to get the support of the Russian population. The accusation of "dangerous sect of Western origin" and the alleged links with the Ukrainian Azov battalion are not to be taken seriously in the West. The aim is the rejection of the West by the Russian Orthodox population.

Russian propaganda

[In Krasnodar and Sochi, searches are being carried out in the cells of the religious sect supporting "Azov"*](#) // Kommersant. 2022. August 14.

[The cells of the "New Generation" sect are being searched](#) // RIA Novosti. 2022. August 14.

[In Russia, the cells of the religious sect supporting "Azov" were searched](#) // Izvestia. 2022. August 14.

[Search in the church and in the pastor's house. Chronology of events](#) // Facebook of Pastor Andrey Matyuzhov. 2022. August 14.

[In the Russian Federation, searches and arrests in churches "New Generation"*](#) // Institute of Religion and Politics. 2022. August 14. (Photos and videos)

Photo : Credit: New Generation Church

Special Bimonthly FORB Digest (15–31.07.2022)

29.07.2022 - In the Krasnoyarsk Territory, the Court is considering the case of Jehovah's Witnesses

Sova Center - In July 2022, it became known that the Kezhemsky District Court of the Krasnoyarsk Territory was considering the case of Ildar Urazbakhtin, a Jehovah's Witness from Kodinsk. He is accused of organizing the activities of an extremist organization (Part 1 of Article 282.2 of the Criminal Code).

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

29.07.2022 - Case of Jehovah's Witness Gevorkyan revisited in Court

Sova Center - On July 14, 2022, the Avtozavodsky District Court of Nizhny Novgorod received the case of Jehovah's Witness Gevorg Gevorkyan, who is accused of organizing the activities of an extremist organization (Part 1, Article 282.2 of the Criminal Code).

The case was initiated in November 2021, it was separated from another case of the Nizhny Novgorod Jehovah's Witnesses. Already in December, the case went to court, but in January it was returned to the prosecutor. This was due to the fact that new materials were added to the case without notifying the defendant and the lawyer. Gevorgyan is under house arrest.

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

28.07.2022 - Verdict approved for Jehovah's Witness Ilyinykh

Sova Center - On July 28, 2022, the Primorsky Regional Court upheld the verdict against Jehovah's Witness Vitaly Ilyinykh. On April 15, the Ussuriysk District Court sentenced him to two and a half years of suspended liberty under Part 2 of Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code (participation in the activities of an extremist organization).

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

27.07.2022 - Court in Kemerovo upholds sentence for Jehovah's Witness

Sova Center - On July 26, 2022, the Kemerovo Regional Court upheld the sentence against Jehovah's Witness Andrey Vlasov under Part 1 of Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code (organization of the activities of an extremist organization). In May, the Central District Court of Prokopyevsk sentenced Vlasov to seven years in prison, serving in a penal colony. Vlasov has a disability group II, he cannot do without outside help.

The criminal case was initiated on July 2, 2020. Vlasov was detained on July 12 and then placed under house arrest. In June 2021, the case went to court.

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

26.07.2022 - The court imposed a fine of half a million rubles on a Jehovah's Witness from the Chelyabinsk Region

Sova Center - On July 26, 2022, the Snezhinsky City Court of the Chelyabinsk Region found Jehovah's Witness Ilya Olenin guilty under Part 1 of Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code (organization of the activities of an extremist organization) and fined him 500 thousand rubles. Earlier, the prosecutor asked to sentence Olenin to the same punishment. According to investigators, 45-year-old Olenin was an elder and, "supervising the activities of meetings of local religious organizations in the Chelyabinsk region in the period from September 2017 to November 2020, he took active steps aimed at organizing the continuation of the illegal activities of a religious organization banned by the court, including a local religious organization.

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

26.07.2022 - In the Chelyabinsk Region, one of Jehovah's Witnesses Ilya Olenin was fined by a Court for discussing the Bible among friends.

Link to full text in Russian: <https://www.jw-russia.org/news/2022/07/261420.html>

On July 26, 2022, Judge Oleg Klementyev of the Snezhinskiy City Court of the Chelyabinsk Region found one of Jehovah's Witnesses Ilya Olenin guilty of organizing the activities of an extremist organization and imposed a fine of 500,000 rubles on him. The believer insists on his complete innocence.

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

25.07.2022 - Mass searches and interrogations of believers took place in the Yaroslavl Region

Link to full text in Russian: <https://www.jw-russia.org/news/2022/07/250918.html>

On the morning of July 13, 2022, searches were carried out in Rybinsk at 16 addresses where Jehovah's Witnesses live; three families were also searched at their country-house. There were no arrests. Criminal cases have been initiated.

The raid was initiated by the Russian Investigative Committee for the Yaroslavl region. Special events were held with the participation of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the National Guard officers, as well as detectives of the Federal Security Service of Russia in the Yaroslavl Region A. Ivanenko, V. Moskalev and D. Kovalenko. The basis was the decision of the Rybinsk City Court of July 12, 2022.

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

25.07.2022 - Russians inflict the most damage upon Moscow church in Ukraine

Link to full text in Russian: <https://cutt.ly/gZmqnv5>

In five months of the full-fledged attack, Russian invaders have damaged no fewer than 183 religious buildings in Ukraine. This was reported by the press service of the Ministry of Culture and Information Policy in a press release given to Ukrinform.

"From 24 February through 23 July 2022, at least 183 religious buildings in no fewer than 14 oblasts of Ukraine were completely destroyed or damaged to various extents as the result of the armed assault by the Russian Federation: churches, mosques, synagogues, and educational and administrative buildings of religious communities of Ukraine. Five of the 183 buildings damaged as the result of the attack of the R.F. were Islamic, 5 were Jewish, and the remaining 173 were Christian," the report says.

[Continue reading...](#)

25.07.2022 - Izberbash again opened a criminal case on involvement in "Nurcular"

Sova Center - On July 22, 2022, the investigative department of the Russian Investigative Committee for the Republic of Dagestan announced the initiation of a criminal case under Part 2 of Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code (participation in the activities of an extremist organization) in relation to a 32-year-old resident of the city of Izberbash, who is suspected of involvement in the activities of the banned religious association Nurcular. According to investigators, from 2015 to April 2017, a resident of Izberbash joined the association and took part in meetings to study its "ideological sources".

[Continue reading...](#)

21.07.2022 - Against the followers of 'Allya Ayat' in Novosibirsk, a case was initiated under Art. 282.2 CC

Sova Center On July 21, 2022, the Main Directorate of the Ministry of Internal Affairs for the Novosibirsk Region announced the initiation of a criminal case under CC. 1 and 2 Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code (organization of the activities of an extremist organization and participation in it) in relation to four residents of Novosibirsk. The police report identifying a resident of the Oktyabrsky district of the city, who, according to them, organized a gathering place for the followers of the Alla Ayat (Elle Ayat) religious group, as well as three residents of the region, "one of whom also performed the coordinating functions of the group," and the other two were active participants. All the defendants in the case were given a preventive measure in the form of a ban on certain actions.

[Continue reading...](#)

15.07.2022 - An appeal in Seversk replaced the prison term of Andrey Ledyaykin with a suspended sentence

Link to full text in Russian : <https://www.jw-russia.org/news/2022/07/151002.html>

On July 14, 2022, a panel of judges of the Tomsk Regional Court mitigated the sentence of one of Jehovah's Witnesses, Andrey Ledyaykin, 33, replacing the sentence of 2 years and 2 months in prison with a suspended sentence of the same term.

In July 2020, FSB and Investigative Committee officers, accompanied by two OMON fighters, arrived at Andrey Ledyakin's place of work, the administration of Seversk, to pick him up for a search of his home.

[Continue reading...](#)

Head of Russian Orthodox Church banned from entering Lithuania

By Anna Neplii

Kyiv Post (30.07.2022) - <https://bit.ly/3Bx0kzy> - The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania has confirmed a ban on the head of the Russian Orthodox Church, Vladimir Gundyaev (AKA 'Patriarch Kirill'), from entering their country. This latest move is part of a continued effort by European nations to sanction Kirill over his support for Russia's war against Ukraine.

"Patriarch Kirill, a close ally of Vladimir Putin, is one of the most active supporters of the war against Ukraine," the ministry said. "He has repeatedly publicly approved the aggression carried out by Russia."

A letter posted on the Orthodox Church of Ukraine's official website stated that "the moral responsibility for the committed crimes rests not only on the direct perpetrators, but also on their ideological inspirers – Moscow Patriarch Kirill and like-minded hierarchs."

Previously, on July 8, Canada imposed sanctions against 29 citizens of Russia. Among them were Kirill, representatives from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Maria Zakharova and Irina Vovk, and Russian television presenter/propagandist Olga Skabieva, who garnered the nickname "the Iron Doll of Putin TV" for her fierce opposition to President Putin's critics. Canada has also imposed sanctions against several Russian media outlets, including Russia Today (RT) and Sputnik.

"Canada is committed to combating disinformation, wherever and whenever it appears. Today we declare to those who commit fraud: you will be held accountable. Canada supports Ukraine," the Canadian Foreign Ministry emphasized in a statement.

Great Britain was the first country to impose sanctions against Patriarch Kirill. On June 16, an official statement from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced that the head of the Russian Orthodox Church was banned from entering the country due to his "blessing" of Russia's war against Ukraine.



Photo: Britannica.com.

Special Bimonthly FORB Digest (01–15.07.2022)

15.07.2022 - Administrative prosecutions for opposing Ukraine war

Police in Yekaterinburg detained artist Ivan Lyubimov for quoting on his anti-war poster John Donne's text "No man is an island" and UN figures for civilian casualties in Ukraine. He awaits charges. Police in Kaluga charged Aleksandr Ivanov for an anti-war statement on his online Orthodox encyclopaedia on the war's first day. For fear of prosecution, the site has been forced to remove its news section, which had reported the destruction of churches in Ukraine and reposted foreign Orthodox leaders' anti-war pronouncements.

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

15.07.2022 - An Appeal in Seversk replaced the prison term of Andrey Ledyaykin with a suspended sentence

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2022/07/151002.html>

On July 14, 2022, a panel of judges of the Tomsk Regional Court mitigated the sentence of one of Jehovah's Witnesses, Andrey Ledyaykin, 33, replacing the sentence of 2 years and 2 months in prison with a suspended sentence of the same term.

In July 2020, FSB and Investigative Committee officers, accompanied by two OMON fighters, arrived at Andrey Ledyaykin's place of work, the administration of Seversk, to pick him up for a search of his home. After the Seversk Investigative Department opened a criminal case against Ledyaykin in March 2021, he was forced to resign. Rosfinmonitoring has included a peaceful believer in the list of extremists and terrorists.

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

13.07.2022 - New cases initiated against Jehovah's Witnesses in Yaroslav Region

Sova Center - On July 13, 2022, the investigative department of the Russian Investigative Committee for the Yaroslavl Region announced the initiation of a criminal case against a 66-year-old and a 45-year-old Jehovah's Witnesses from Rybinsk. They became suspects of participating in the activities of an extremist organization (Part 2 of Article 282.2 of the Criminal Code).

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

11.07.2022 - In Surgut, Jehovah's Witnesses have been searched again, including those who were tortured by security forces

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2022/07/111435.html>

Early in the morning of July 7, 2022, searches were carried out in Surgut in at least 5 dwellings of believers. The security forces again came to the apartments of Kirill Severinchyk and Yevhen Kayryak, who were tortured by the security forces in 2019.

The new raid was carried out by employees of the 4th Investigation Department of the Main Investigative Directorate of the Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation with the participation of employees of the local Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Federal Security Service for the Tyumen Region and the OMON of the Department of the Russian Guard for the Khanty-Mansiysk Autonomous Okrug. According to eyewitnesses, law enforcement officers behaved respectfully towards believers. The security forces seized Bibles, personal photographs, electronic devices, storage media, bank cards, and a board game.

[Continue reading...](#)

08.07.2022 - It came to the court of Jehovah's Witness from Krasnoyarsk

Sova Center - On June 30, 2022, the Zheleznodorozhny District Court of Krasnoyarsk received the case of Jehovah's Witness Igor Gusev, accused of organizing the activities of an extremist organization (Part 1, Article 282.2 of the Criminal Code).

The criminal case was initiated on February 17, 2022. According to investigators, Gusev "organized religious performances and services." In May 2020, he was interrogated as a witness in the case of another believer from Krasnoyarsk, Vitaly Sukhov; in December 2021, Sukhov was given a suspended sentence of six years in prison.

[Continue reading...](#)

11.07.2022 - Second Orthodox priest facing criminal charges for opposing Ukraine war

The Investigative Committee has opened a criminal case against a Russian Orthodox priest, Fr Nikandr Pinchuk from Sverdlovsk Region, for his opposition to Russia's 2022 war against Ukraine. He opposed Russia's attack on Ukraine on religious grounds, describing it to Forum 18 as a "mortal sin". After being fined for his comments in March, he is now under investigation under Criminal Code Article 280.3, which punishes a repeat offence of "discrediting" the Armed Forces. He remains a suspect and has not been arrested.

[Continue reading...](#)

08.07.2022 - Orthodox priest detained for opposing war "outraged by absurdity of accusations"

The Investigative Committee has opened a criminal case against a Russian Orthodox priest for his explicitly religious opposition to Russia's 2022 war against Ukraine. Fr Ioann Kurmoyarov

had posted videos online criticising the war. Arrested on 7 June, he is currently in detention at St Petersburg's Kresty prison awaiting trial for the new criminal offence of disseminating "knowingly false information" about the Russian military (Criminal Code Article 207.3). Fr Ioann is "outraged by the absurdity of the accusations," his lawyer told Forum 18.

[Continue reading...](#)

02.07.2022 - Evangelical Christians in Kabardino-Balkaria charged with illegal missionary activity

Link to full text in Russian : <https://ovd.news/express-news/2022/07/02/evangelskim-hristianam-v-kabardino-balkarii-vmenili-nezakonnuyu>

Evangelical Christians in the town of Nartkaly in Kabardino-Balkaria were charged with an administrative report on illegal missionary activity. This is reported by the publication "Kavkaz.Realii".

A representative of the religious organization, who wished to remain anonymous, said that the security forces had inspected the premises of the Church of Evangelical Christians. After that, a protocol was drawn up for the organization on the implementation of missionary activities without indicating its official full name (**part 3 of article 5.26 of the Code of Administrative Offenses**).

[Continue reading...](#)

01.07.2022 - A Seversk appeal upheld Sergey Belousov's suspended three-year sentence for practicing faith in God

Link to full text in Russian : <https://jw-russia.org/news/2022/07/011113.html>

The Urvansky District Court in Kabardino-Balkaria approved a decision to bring to administrative responsibility the local religious organization "Church of Adventist Christians of the Seventh Day" in the city of Nartkala. The church was fined 30,000 rubles for illegal religious activities.

[Continue reading...](#)

01.07.2022 - Tomsk Regional Court replaced Seversk-Based Andrey Kolesnichenko's four-year prison sentence with a suspended sentence

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2022/07/011108.html>

On June 30, 2022, the Tomsk Regional Court, chaired by Judge Andrey Kaplyuk, mitigated the sentence imposed by the court of first instance and replaced Andrey Kolesnichenko, 52, having changed four years in a penal colony for four years of probation.

The hearing was held via video-conferencing, as Kolesnichenko is in a pre-trial detention center in the city of Kolpashevo, which is more than 300 kilometers from Seversk. After the decision

of the Court of Appeal, the believer was released. The verdict has entered into force. Kolesnichenko has the right to appeal against it in the cassation procedure.

[Continue reading...](#)

01.07.2022 - The Investigative Committee announced the completion of the investigation into the case of ten Jehovah's Witnesses from Vladivostok

Sova Center - On July 1, 2022, the Investigation Department of the Russian Investigative Committee for the Primorsky Territory announced the completion of the investigation into the case of Jehovah's Witnesses. The defendants in this case, initiated back in 2018, are ten residents of Vladivostok.

According to Jehovah's Witnesses, Igor Lonchakov and Yuri Redozubov are accused of organizing the activities of an extremist organization (Part 1, Article 282.2 of the Criminal Code). Nina Astvatsaturova, Elena Barmakina, Ludviga Katanaeva, Ekaterina Treguba, Elena Tsorn, Roman and Violetta Verigina are accused of participating in the activities of this organization (Part 2 of Article 282.2 of the Criminal Code). Unfortunately, we do not know the name of the tenth defendant. Earlier it was reported that Eva Katanaeva may also be among the defendants in the case.

[Continue reading...](#)

Final sentences to prison terms for 20 Jehovah's Witnesses since 1 January 2022

By Willy Fautré

European Times (04.07.2022) - <https://bit.ly/3IiVMOK> -The persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses is going on unabated. In the last six months, 20 of them have been sentenced for practising their religion and are serving their prison term. Here is the list:

06 June 2022: Vladimir Ermolaev, 34 years (6 ½ years)

Alexander Putintsev, 48 years (6 ½ years)

Igor Mamalimov, 46 years (6 years in a colony)

31 May 2002: Rustam Seidkuliev, 45 years old (2 years and 4 months)

23 May 2022: Lyudmila Shchekoldina, 46 years '4 years and 1 month)

23 May 2022: Andrey Vlasov, 53 years old (7 years)

23 May 2022: Lyudmila Shchekoldina, 45 years old (4 years and 1 month in a penal colony)

26 April 2022: Andrey Ledyakin, 34 years old (2 years and 2 months)

19 April 2022: Konstantin Samsonov, 45 years old (7 years 1/2 years)

18 March 2022: Valeriy Rogozin, 60 years old (6 years and 5 months in a penal colony)

Denis Peresunko, 54 years old (6 years and 6 months)

Sergey Melnik, 57 years old (6 years in a penal colony)

Igor Egozaryan, 57 years old (6 years in a penal colony)

07 February 2022: Yuriy Saveliyev, 68 years old (6 years + 1 year of restricted freedom)

02 February 2022: Anatoliy Gorbunov, 64 years old (6 years)

25 January 2022: Anna Safronova, 57 years old (6 years)

20 January 2022: Yevgeny Korotun, 52 years old (7 years + 2 years of restricted freedom)

20 January 2022: Andrei Kolesnichenko, 52 years old (4 years + 1 year of restricted freedom)

19 January 2022: Alexei Ershov, 68 years old (3 years)

17 January 2022: Maksim Beltikov, 42 years old (2 years)

Vladimir Ermolaev and Alexander Putintsev sentenced to 6 ½ years, and Igor Mamalimov to 6 years in a colony

On June 6, 2022, Marina Kuklina, a judge of the Central District Court of Chita, sentenced **Vladimir Ermolaev** and **Alexander Putintsev** to 6.5 years, and **Igor Mamalimov** to 6 years in a colony, they were taken into custody. Sergei Kirilyuk received 6 years probation.

For Mamalimov and Kirilyuk, the prosecutor requested 6 years of suspended sentence, for Vladimir Ermolaev and Aleksandr Putintsev—7 years of real imprisonment, although there are no victims and evidence of crimes against the state and the individual in the case. Believers resolutely deny the guilt of extremism, the verdict has not entered into force and can be appealed.

The criminal case was initiated on January 20, 2020. Six months earlier, the Chita believers noticed that they were being followed, and while relaxing by the river, they discovered tracking devices and hidden audio recordings. On February 10, 2020, FSB officers conducted **50** **searches** in Chita and other settlements in Transbaikalia. The security forces invaded the homes of the elderly, the disabled, large families and other believers. The search in the house of Sergey Kirilyuk took place in front of his wife, who has a group II disability, and a minor child. During the raid, Vadim Kutsenko was strangled and **tortured** with a stun gun. He, as well as Vladimir Ermolaev, was detained and placed in a temporary detention facility.

In total, 8 believers were suspected of organizing extremist activities, but in January 2021, charges were dropped against Vadim Kutsenko, Aleksey Loskutov, Georgiy Senotrusov and Pavel Mamalimov due to the lack of corpus delicti. The Investigative Committee for the Trans-Baikal Territory investigated the case against Ermolaev, Kirilyuk, Putintsev and Igor Mamalimov for 1 year and 1 month. Then it was taken to court.

All four defendants were included in the list of extremists of Rosfinmonitoring, their bank accounts were blocked. This had a particularly negative impact on the family of Igor Mamalimov, the father of three young children, who is the only breadwinner despite poor health. His wife, Nataliya, does not work due to childcare. Addressing the court, the believer **said** : “In my heart there is no resentment against anyone who accuses me, and even in my thoughts I do not hold malice against them. Deep down, I don’t feel any hatred.”

Vladimir Ermolaev spent 3 days in a temporary detention center and 50 days under house arrest, after which the investigator took a written undertaking not to leave him. Sergey Kirilyuk spent 5 days in a temporary detention center and was also released on bail. As a result, all four believers remained under house arrest for about 2.5 years.

This is the first guilty verdict under Article 282.2 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation issued to Jehovah’s Witnesses in the Trans-Baikal Territory.

Rustam Seidkuliev sentenced to 2 years and 4 months

In May 2021, the court found 45-year old **Rustam Seidkuliev** guilty of participating in extremist activities. He was first sentenced to 2 ½ years in prison with restriction of liberty for a period of 1 year. Later, the court of appeal reduced this period by 2 months.

On 31 May 2022, the First Court of Cassation of General Jurisdiction in Saratov left the appellate ruling of the Saratov Regional Court unchanged.

He has started serving his sentence in a penal colony of general regime: Penal Colony No. 33 in Saratov Region.

Seidkuliev was born in 1977 in Ashgabat (former Turkmen SSR). As a child, he was engaged in freestyle wrestling, martial arts. He graduated from college and acquired the profession of a telephone master.

In 1993, he became a Jehovah's Witness.

Rustam's religious convictions do not allow taking up arms, so he refused to do military service. For refusing to join the army, he was twice convicted (in 1995 and 1996) and spent 1 year and 8 months in a general regime colony.

In 2000, the family moved from Turkmenistan to Saratov, as Rustam's stepfather was deported from the country because of his religion.

A year after the move, Rustam met his future wife Yuliya, who at that time had already been a Jehovah's Witness for 8 years.

Lyudmila Shchekoldina sentenced to 4 years and 1 month

On 23 May 2022, a court sentenced **Lyudmila Shchekoldina** to a term of 4 years 1 month with deprivation of the right to engage in activities related to the organization of Jehovah's Witnesses and participation in public associations.

She is currently held in a correctional colony of general regime: Detention Center No. 1 in Krasnodar Territory.

Shchekoldina was born in June 1976 in the village of Alexandrovka (Krasnodar Territory).

On 29 April 2020, at the height of the pandemic, FSB officers with representatives of the local Cossacks broke into the houses of civilians in two villages of the Krasnodar Territory, conducted **searches and interrogations**. Lyudmila Shchekoldina from the village of Pavlovskaya was suspected by the security forces of being "an adherent of a banned organization." A criminal case was initiated against her, and a written undertaking not to leave was taken from the believer.

After graduating from the Oryol State University, she received the specialty "primary school teacher with the right to teach Russian language and literature in the middle classes." As a specialist in the social protection service, in her native village she worked with pensioners, disabled people, and orphans. In 2007 she moved to the village of Pavlovskaya. There she worked as a plasterer, a housekeeper, and then as a janitor at a sports school.

Source: <http://jw-russia.org>

Oral statement at the UN for prosecution of Patriarch Kirill

Statement at the 50th Human Rights Council of the United Nations

HRWF (07.07.2022) - CAP Liberté de Conscience shares its deep concerns with Human Rights Without Frontiers which has documented, for the International Criminal Court, the grave responsibility of Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia in the outbreak and extension of Russia's war on Ukraine.

CAP calls upon the U.N. to collaborate with the ICC which is currently busy evidencing war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in Ukraine and identifying the perpetrators to be held accountable.

The prosecution of Patriarch Kirill falls within Article 25 of the Rome Statute which provides that "*a person shall be criminally responsible and liable for punishment for a crime within the jurisdiction of the Court if that person for the purpose of facilitating the commission of such a crime, aids, abets or otherwise assists in its commission or its attempted commission.*"

Moreover, on 7 April 2022, the European Parliament adopted a [Resolution](#) in which it condemned the role of Patriarch Kirill, in providing theological cover for Russia's aggression on Ukraine.

Read more

English:

<https://www.un Geneva.org/en/news-media/meeting-summary/2022/07/au-3-juillet-le-haut-commissariat-recense-plus-de-dix-mille>

French:

<https://www.un Geneva.org/fr/news-media/meeting-summary/2022/07/au-3-juillet-le-haut-commissariat-recense-plus-de-dix-mille>

Photo: UN Live United Nations Web TV

Russian leading anti-cultist calls Ukrainians "nazis," "satanists," and "cannibals"

Archpriest Alexander Novopashin is vice-president of Russia's largest anti-cult organization, and still styles himself as a "corresponding member" of FECRIS.

By Massimo Introvigne

Bitter Winter (04.07.2022)- <https://bit.ly/3aaZjly> - A journalist friend of Bitter Winter received from the Diocese of Novosibirsk of the Russian Orthodox Church the text of an interview by Archpriest Alexander Novopashin [published by the Komsomolskaya Pravda](#) on June 24, and a

CV explaining why Novopashin matters and the interview was important. He sent it to us, knowing we follow Novopashin with interest.

He is, as the CV (which is also [published on the website](#) of the missionary department of his diocese) explains, a “corresponding member” of FECRIS, the European Federation of Centers of Research and Information on Cults and Sects. The same web site [emphasizes](#) the role of Novopashin as vice-president of the Center for Religious Studies, the Russian anti-cult umbrella organization whose President is the FECRIS board member Alexander Dvorkin.

As [Bitter Winter has reported](#), after the Russian aggression against Ukraine the Center for Religious Studies disappeared from the list of FECRIS member organizations on FECRIS’s web site, although no official statement or press release explained why. As far as we know, Dvorkin is still a member of FECRIS’ board. And if FECRIS does not consider Novopashin as a “corresponding member” any longer, it should say so clearly and take action against his website.

All this is of some interest in view of the “important” interview with Novopashin his diocese is advertising and has republished. We are accustomed to Russian propaganda, and to the fact that Russian FECRIS-connected anti-cultists such as Alexander Dvorkin accuse “the cults” of having worked with the American intelligence to create the democratic movement in Ukraine.

However, the FECRIS “corresponding member”’s interview is extreme even by Russian standards. The interviewer starts by telling Novopashin that, “There is a Z sign on your service church car. Your position regarding the special military operation in Ukraine becomes immediately clear.” The anti-cult leader answers that he “expressed [his] position on the very first day of the special operation, calling it anti-terrorist, by the way. Because the political regime of Ukraine is undoubtedly terrorist, extremist, misanthropic, Nazi. The Z sign means a world in which there is no place for Nazism and Satanism. For me, Nazism and Satanism are synonymous words.”

Novopashin reminisces that in the good old Soviet times Ukrainians felt they were not really separated from Russia. But then Ukraine rapidly went “downhill, according to the plans prepared by Western and American experts who are pretty well versed in destructive activities. The work to split our people has been carried out incessantly, especially intensively for the last thirty years, and, unfortunately, not without success. It took a lot of money to do this. But the work on the separation of Ukrainians and Russians reached its apogee after Euromaidan. Ukrainians seem to have been completely changed. They have become different. And this is understandable, because the pressure on their consciousness was unprecedented. And it continues for this purpose.” The West, Novopashin explains as an expert on “cults,” used the same “psychotechniques” used by “cults.” In fact, it used them in Ukraine by infiltrating or sponsoring “cults” there.

The aim of the dual conspiracy of the West and the “cults” in Ukraine, Novopashin explains, was to promote “Nazism.” “A significant part of the population of Ukraine is imbued with this ideology... but Ukrainian youth have suffered especially. Actually, the West was counting on it, the youth, initially.”

In fact, Novopashin explains, Ukrainians are so Nazi that even children in schools prepare dishes for the holidays and give them names “like ‘Blood of Russian babies’ and so on. Although, of course, Ukrainian school teachers helped them in coming up with the names. Children are made cannibals.”

They do not actually eat Russian human flesh or drink Russian blood in schools, but they become cannibals psychologically, Novopashin believes. When they grow up, they pass to “action.” For example, Novopashin says, “a seemingly prosperous Ukrainian girl writes in social networks that prisoners of war should be sold for organs. And she gets likes. The worst thing is that these are not just statements, they are a call to action.” Because of the Western and cultist “brainwashing,” in Ukraine now “the whole air is poisoned by Nazi ideology, Ukrainians are forced to breathe it. Of course, even in this case, not all become ukronazists or radical nationalists, but the others just turn a blind eye to what is happening... However, when they are given a machine gun in their hands and told to go and kill the Russians, they go and kill. Including civilians, children, pregnant women, the elderly. Maybe they are not neo-Nazis in spirit, but they are killing... Do you understand?”

One objection by the interviewer is that there are Russian-speaking Ukrainians fighting for Ukraine against Russia. Novopashin answers that they have been brainwashed and have become “Russian bastards.” “This is just about what can be done to a person, daily, hourly affecting her consciousness. Deprive her of critical thinking, remove the protective barrier—and then you can upload anything into a person’s head. And as a result, depending on the information with which she is fed, a person can mentally degrade. Russians, who have mentally degraded, cease to be Russians, they become ‘Russian bastards.’ Russian bastards hate everything Russian: faith, culture, history, literature. The Azov Regiment is made of Russian bastards. Academician of the Russian Academy of Sciences Sergey Yurievich Glazyev says that Russian bastards are worse than fascists, and declares that we, Russians, cannot have any dialogue with Russian bastards.”

How did the West operate? It understood, Novopashin explains, that it should destroy the Russian Orthodox Church, and it did it through the “cults.” “Cultist, primarily neo-Pentecostal, and neo-pagan organizations began to be created in Ukraine from the beginning of the 1990s, in which tens of thousands of Ukrainians were fraudulently involved. The neo-pagans showed themselves to be the most aggressive. They sawed down wayside crosses, set fire to Orthodox churches and chapels. But the neo-Pentecostals were not much better than them. They did not set fire to churches, but... It is well known that neo-Pentecostal missionaries were sent from Ukraine to Russia, whose goal was to ‘reform the consciousness of Russians on the basis of the Euromaidan values,’ spread the ‘theology of Maidan,’ create cultic communities in the form of sleeping cells on ‘enemy territory,’ that is, on our territory, which could be quickly awakened in case of any disturbances. Let me remind you that this was the case on the Maidan, when thousands of members of the cults came to the square in the center of Kiev.”

With the war, Novopashin insists, the cat is out of the bag and Ukrainian “cultists” show their true Satanist self. Many “members of the Ukrainian national security forces,” the anti-cultists explains, “perform Satanic rituals, paint their bodies not only with swastikas, but also with Satanic and occult symbols. In fact, these are cults... The Nazis declare themselves servants of Satan and challenge God.”

Novopashin admits that he has no evidence that the Ukraine military perform human sacrifices to Satan or cannibalism. “But if the Nazi Satanists, he asks, painted with occult and pagan signs, cut the prisoners’ throats, do not spare the elderly, rape, and then brutally kill women and children by carving swastikas on the dead bodies, is this not the same act of sacrifice to their pagan gods?”

But why should the West promote such horrors in Ukraine? The “FECRIS corresponding member” has the answer: “To destroy everything that connects Ukraine with the Greater Russia, the Russian civilization, with Russia, with the Russian world. Such an ideology is always destructive... The special operation of denazification is carried out not only to destroy the hydra in its lair, but to protect the whole Russian world.” However, Novopashin believes that destroying the hydra in Ukraine would not be enough. The West, he says, is already at work in other countries. “After an end will be put to Ukrainian Nazism, some other aggressor country will appear, through which the United States will begin to threaten Russia. A civilizational war cannot be avoided.”

These theories seem to suggest that the Archpriest is not operating with a full deck, but it is important to note that Novopashin is not a lonely madman. His interviews are reprinted nationwide, and advertised by his diocese of the Russian Orthodox Church.

Maybe, but we do not know for sure, the membership of his organization in the FECRIS has been recently suspended, but he claims to be still with FECRIS as an individual. And Novopashin and Dvorkin did not develop these ideas overnight when Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022. Russian anti-cultists started making preposterous claims about “cultists” being used by the CIA to create a democratic anti-Russian movement in Ukraine at the time of the Orange Revolution in 2004, and continued in 2014 and beyond. During all these times, they were part of FECRIS and hailed by FECRIS as particularly effective members. It would be difficult now for FECRIS to claim it didn’t know what the positions of its Russian affiliates were about Ukraine.

Photo: Archpriest Alexander Novopashin. From VKontakte.

Special Bimonthly FORB Digest (16–30.06.2022)

30.06.2022 - The Vladimir court declared illegal the ban on chanting the mantra

Link to full text in Russian: <https://cutt.ly/dK3kVtH>

Followers of the Hindu religion appealed to the court against the decision of the mayor's office to refuse to agree on a religious event.

The Oktyabrsky District Court of the city of Vladimir satisfied the administrative claim of a local resident Olga Khaustova against the mayor's office. She appealed the decision of the first deputy head of the city administration to refuse to approve a public religious event for the chanting of a Hindu mantra. The woman herself informed our editors about this.

[Continue reading...](#)

28.06.2022 - In Pskov Region, the Court completely acquitted Aleksey Khabarov - one of Jehovah's Witnesses

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2022/06/291557.html>

On June 27, 2022, Porkhovsky District Court of Pskov Region found 47-year-old Aleksey Khabarov not guilty of participation in activity of extremist organization (article 282.2 part 2 of Criminal Code of Russian Federation). Friends who came to support the believer met the court's decision with applause.

The verdict will come into force, if the prosecutor's office does not appeal. For now, Aleksey Khabarov will continue to be under recognizance agreement.

[Continue reading...](#)

27.06.2022 - In Yekaterinburg, the Buddhist center of the Karma Kagyu Association is suing for the building.

Sova Center - On June 22, 2022, it became known that the Buddhist center in Yekaterinburg is defending the rights to the newly purchased building through the court.

According to the head of the Russian Association of Buddhists Karma Kagyu Alexander Koybagarov, the organization used to occupy premises on the outskirts of the city, but then managed to buy a building in the center of Yekaterinburg. The opening of the Center took place in February 2022. Shortly thereafter, the former owner of the building claimed that it had been bought from him by fraud. Now the Buddhists are proving the legitimacy of the transaction through the courts.

Previously, the Karma Kagyu Buddhist Association managed to win [a lawsuit](#) over similar claims in a deal to acquire a building in Moscow.

27.06.2022 - In Krasnoyarsk, Yevgeniy Zinich, a descendant of Jehovah's witnesses who were repressed in Soviet times, was sentenced to six years in penal colony.

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2022/06/271613.html>

On June 27, 2022, Nataliya Nikolayeva, judge of the Oktyabrskiy District Court of Krasnoyarsk, sentenced Jehovah's Witness Yevgeniy Zinich to 6 years in penal colony because he did not renounce his faith in Jehovah God after the confession's Russian legal entities were banned in 2017. The believer was taken into custody in the courtroom.

Yevgeniy Zinich, 56, is a third-generation Jehovah's Witness. His family had already been subjected to religious repression by the authorities: for refusing to take up arms for religious

reasons, his grandfather received a 5-year prison term, in 1951, Yevgeniy's mother and her parents were exiled to Khakassia as part of Operation "North", and his father was sentenced to 10 years for transporting religious literature.

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

23.06.2022 - New searches in homes of believers in the Trans-Baikal Territory. For one victim, history repeats itself 71 years later.

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2022/06/231001.html>

On June 14, 2022, at least 5 civilians were subjected to searches in the town of Baley, Trans-Baikal Territory. These are Lidiya Bzovi, Yelena Baylukova, 71-year-old Tatyana Kuznetsova and the Saranchuk spouses: 75-year-old Valeriy and 71-year-old Tatyana.

The elderly believer Lidiya Bzovi is facing religious persecution for the second time in her life. In 1951, by order of Joseph Stalin, she was exiled to Siberia along with other Jehovah's Witnesses. That sad page in the history of Soviet repressions was called Operation North.

[**Continue reading**](#)

22.06.2022 - The City Court of Naberezhnye Chelny left the claim of the prosecutor's office to ban 160 books by Said Nursi without consideration.

Earlier, the decision to ban books was canceled by the Supreme Court of Tatarstan.

On June 21, 2022, the Naberezhnye Chelny City Court decided to leave the claim of the republican prosecutor's office for the recognition of 47 titles of books and series represented by several books as extremist without consideration. Earlier, in November 2021, the court sent the publications for examination. Unfortunately, we do not have information about what conclusions the experts came to and whether they translated the books published in the Old Turkish language. According to lawyer Ruslan Nagiyev, the decision to leave the claim without consideration was made, among other things, in connection with the defendants' argument that most of the books that the prosecutor's office sought to ban were published in a language that the court does not speak.

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

22.06.2022 - The Court of Appeals sentenced Anatoliy Gorbunov, a retiree from Krasnoyarsk, to serve a six-year sentence in a penal colony.

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2022/06/220929.html>

On June 21, 2022, a panel of judges of the Krasnoyarsk Regional Court, chaired by Yuriy Tsybulya, upheld the decision of the lower court regarding Anatoliy Gorbunov, 64. The sentence for faith in Jehovah God — 6 years in a penal colony — came into force.

Hearings in the court of first instance lasted more than a year, all this time the believer was under a recognizance not to leave. After the verdict was announced, he spent more than four months in a pre-trial detention center awaiting an appeal.

[Continue reading...](#)

20.06.2022 - In Dzhankoy, the court confirmed the fine to the imam for conducting Friday prayers

Sova Center - On June 16, 2022, the Dzhankoysky District Court of Crimea confirmed the decision of the world court on a fine of 20,000 rubles imposed on Emir Medzhitov for "illegal" missionary work.

The defense asked to cancel the decision of the court of first instance, pointing out numerous procedural violations, as well as the fact that the prosecutor's office did not provide evidence that Medzhitov did not just conduct Friday prayers, but carried out missionary activities. The district court dismissed the complaint.

17.06.2022 - ECHR considered why Jehovah's witnesses were declared extremists and explained why this was illegal.

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2022/06/171114.html>

The inclusion of Jehovah's Witnesses publications in the extremist list was the foundation for the subsequent ban of activities and criminal prosecution of believers. In June 2022, the European Court of Human Rights issued a ruling in which it thoroughly analyzed all the logical and legal errors made by Russian courts.

[Continue reading...](#)

06.06.2022 - A court in Chita sentenced three Jehovah's Witnesses to 6 to 6.5 years in prison, another received a suspended sentence for believing in God

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2022/06/061626.html>

On June 6, 2022, Marina Kuklina, a judge of the Central District Court of Chita, sentenced Vladimir Ermolaev and Alexander Putintsev to 6.5 years, and Igor Mamalimov to 6 years in a colony, they were taken into custody. Sergei Kirilyuk received 6 years probation.

[Continue reading...](#)

17.06.2022 - Adventist community fined in Nartkal for 'illegal' missionary work.

Sova Center -On June 17, 2022, it became known that the Urvan District Court of Kabardino-Balkaria approved an earlier ruling imposing a fine for "illegal" missionary activity on the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Nartkal.

The fine amounted to 30 thousand rubles.



According to pastor Yuri Zhemukhov, in January, FSB officers seized unmarked religious literature from the church building, including the Hymn of Hope religious songbook, several newspapers, and a Bible forgotten by one of the parishioners during a search in the church building in January.

In addition, according to the FSB, a man was handing out a New Testament and a Psalter near the church. According to the pastor, the case was fabricated: "Firstly, near our church, we do not distribute religious literature at all. The testimonies of the witnesses are carbon-copied - they are both from [the village] Maiskoye, allegedly came specially to walk along our street. In court, they said that I distributed the books, although in the testimony before that they said that the books were given to them by a man who advised them to contact me later. Supposedly I can clarify those things. which they will not understand.

The pastor also said that shortly before the search, the deputy head of the FSB department in Nartkal, Sergei Setikov, asked him for a New Testament and a Psalter without the stamp of a religious organization, but there were no such publications in the church.

17.06.2022 - Adventists from Nartkala declared forgery in the case of distribution of religious literature

Link to full text in Russian : <https://cutt.ly/GK3kw1C>

The Urvansky District Court in Kabardino-Balkaria approved a decision to bring to administrative responsibility the local religious organization "Church of Adventist Christians of the Seventh Day" in the city of Nartkala. The church was fined 30,000 rubles for illegal religious activities.

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

16.06.2022 - An appeal in Abakan upheld suspended sentences for two believers-two-and-a-half years each for holding Bible discussions.

Link to full text in Russian : <https://jw-russia.org/news/2022/06/161118.html>

On June 16, 2022, the Supreme Court of the Republic of Khakassia approved the verdict against Alexander Vergunov and Matryona Spiridi. The Judicial Collegium, chaired by Judge Elena Dyukareva, considered attending services and discussing the Bible a criminal offense. In the court of first instance, it turned out that most of the 42 witnesses either did not know the defendants or were confused in their testimony. Despite this, the prosecutor asked to sentence the believers to 5 years in prison. The court limited itself to a suspended sentence: 2.5 years each.

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

Special Bimonthly FORB Digest (01–15.06.2022)

14.06.2022 - Old Believer community in Simferopol fined for "illegal" missionary work

Sova center - On May 30, 2022, the Magistrate Court of Court District No. 16 of the Central Judicial District of Simferopol fined the Orthodox Old Believer community of the city under Part 3 of Art. 5.26 of the Code of Administrative Offenses (carrying out by a religious organization of activities without indicating its official full name, including the release or distribution of literature with incomplete or deliberately false labeling as part of missionary activities). The amount of the fine was 30 thousand rubles.

The protocol was drawn up based on the results of a prosecutor's check, which established that the community carried out missionary activities on the Internet without indicating its full name in the published video and audio materials.

10.06.2022 - A criminal case has been initiated in connection with an act of vandalism at a rural cemetery in Tatarstan

Sova Center - On June 10, 2022, on the fact of desecration of an Orthodox burial place at the cemetery of the village of Aktanysh, Aktanysh district, a case was initiated under clause "b" part 2 of article 244 of the Criminal Code (desecration of the bodies of the dead and their burial places based on political, ideological, racial, national or religious hatred or enmity, or motivated by hatred or enmity against any social group).

Recall that vandals have already cut down a cross on this grave in 2021

09.06.2022 - Crucial judgement for Jehovah's Witnesses as Russia tries to deny ECHR jurisdiction for its war crimes in Ukraine

The European Court of Human Rights has found Russia's ban of the Jehovah's Witnesses to be unlawful and has ordered, among other things, that Russia discontinue current proceedings and release those imprisoned for their faith. The judgement in the Case of Taganrog and Others vs. Russia was made public on 7 June, 2022, and joins 20 applications from believers lodged between 2010 and 2019. The Court's ruling could not be clearer, but it is belated and, unfortunately, very likely to be ignored.

[Continue reading ...](#)

10.06.2022 - Russia's persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses: Unlawful, the European Court of Human Rights says

On June 7, 2022, the European Court of Human Rights in the case “Taganrog LRO and Others v. Russia” rendered a historic decision that declared the Russian liquidation of the Jehovah's Witnesses and the repression of this religious organization in Russia unlawful. The decision concerned twenty different cases about the Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia, which were

consolidated. “Taganrog LRO” refers to the local branch of the Jehovah’s Witnesses in Taganrog, in the Rostov Oblast, whose liquidation was ordered in 2009.

[Continue reading...](#)

08.06.2022 - European court sides with Jehovah's Witnesses

Europe’s highest human rights court ordered Moscow to overturn its ban on the country’s Jehovah’s Witnesses Tuesday, just hours before Russian lawmakers passed legislation ending its jurisdiction.

The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) said Tuesday that Russia violated 1,444 worshippers’ right to religious freedom when it declared the Christian organization an “extremist” group in 2017.

“The court found that the definition of ‘extremism’ was overly broad in Russian law and had been misused for the prosecution of believers or religious ministers on the basis of the content of their beliefs alone,” the ECHR ruled.

[Continue reading](#)

08.06.2022 - In Naberezhnye Chelny, the case of three alleged followers of Said Nursi was brought to court

On June 8, 2022, the Investigative Department of the Investigative Committee for the Republic of Tatarstan announced that the case of three residents of Naberezhnye Chelny, accused of chch. 1 and 2 Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code (organization of activities of an extremist organization and participation in such) in involvement in the banned religious association "Nurcular".

Obviously, we are talking about Khunar Agaev, Aidar Sageev and Amrakh Akhmedov, who were detained on November 23 and arrested on November 25, 2021.

[Continue reading...](#)

07.06.2022 - A criminal case against three Jehovah's Witnesses has been closed in Severodvinsk. No crime was found

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2022/06/071443.html>

On May 17, 2022, the criminal case against Vladimir Teterin, Andrey Maksimovich and Sergey Potylitsyn was closed in the Arkhangelsk Region. Their criminal case was dismissed due to the absence of corpus delicti, the money and car were no longer arrested.

[Continue reading...](#)

06.06.2022 - Vyazemsky-Based Yegor Baranov received a five-year suspended sentence for holding discussions about the Bible

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2022/06/061642.html>

On June 6, 2022, Marina Kuklina, a judge of the Central District Court of Chita, sentenced Vladimir Ermolaev and Alexander Putintsev to 6.5 years, and Igor Mamalimov to 6 years in a colony, they were taken into custody. Sergei Kirilyuk received 6 years probation.

[Continue reading...](#)

06.06.2022 - A court in Chita sentenced three Jehovah's Witnesses to 6 to 6.5 years in prison, another received a suspended sentence for believing in God

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2022/06/061626.html>

On June 6, 2022, Marina Kuklina, a judge of the Central District Court of Chita, sentenced Vladimir Ermolaev and Alexander Putintsev to 6.5 years, and Igor Mamalimov to 6 years in a colony, they were taken into custody. Sergei Kirilyuk received 6 years probation.

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06.06.2022 - Six Jehovah's Witnesses in Kirov, including a Polish citizen, received suspended sentences for reading the Bible

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2022/06/031626.html>

On June 3, 2022, the judge of the Pervomayskiy District Court of Kirov, Timur Yusupov, convicted six believers and sentenced them to 2.5 to 6.5 years of suspended imprisonment, considering the reading and discussion of the Bible as extremism.

[Continue reading...](#)

03.06.2022 - Russians do not spare monastery of Moscow patriarchate

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

On 3 June 2022, in the Dormition cathedral of the Sviatogorsk lavra, Metropolitan of Sviatogorsk Arseny conducted the service of the burial of monastics who perished during shelling of the cloister. This was reported by the press service of the Donetsk diocese on its Facebook page.

The monks and parishioners of the cloister conducted on their final journey the dean of the lavra, Arkhimandrite Galaktion; the monk Aristoklij; and the nun Barbara.

[Continue reading...](#)

01.06.2022 - Renewed criminal trials of Muslim Nursi readers

Three Muslims who met with others to study the works of theologian Said Nursi are on criminal trial on "extremism" charges in Izberbash, Dagestan. Judges closed similar cases with the "active repentance" of the defendants, the court claims. "People have been persuaded or forced to sign confessions by intimidation and deception," says a fellow Muslim. Other criminal cases continue in Dagestan and Tatarstan. Criminal cases against almost 200 Jehovah's Witnesses are in court. On 1 June, a Vladivostok court handed six Jehovah's Witnesses suspended sentences.

[Continue reading...](#)

FECRIS should lose its Consultative Status with the United Nations ECOSOC

Bitter Winter (14/06/2022) - <https://bit.ly/3HyZzY0> - Bitter Winter [proved in a series of articles](#) that the anti-cult organization FECRIS and its affiliates constantly supported Russia and China. An international appeal (with many Ukrainian signatures).

By Bitter Winter

The Honorable Antony J. Blinken

Secretary of State

U.S. Department of State

2201 C Street, NW

Washington, DC 20230

Dear Secretary Blinken:

We write as an informal group of organizations and individuals who are religious and secular leaders, human rights advocates, practitioners, and scholars to respectfully urge you, as a member of the Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) at the United Nations (UN), to request the withdrawal of consultative status that is currently held by FECRIS (the European Federation of Centres for Research and Information on Sects and Cults) with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).

This letter is a multi-faith initiative of the International Religious Freedom (IRF) Roundtable, a multi-faith, inclusive (of all faiths and beliefs), equal citizenship forum that has proven it is

possible to engage cooperatively and constructively across deep differences and increase mutual understanding, respect, trust, and reliance through joint advocacy actions.

While we hold an extremely broad diversity of theological views and political positions, we all agree on the importance of international religious freedom. It strengthens cultures and provides the foundation for stable democracies and their components, including civil society, economic growth, and social harmony. As such, it is also an effective counter-terrorism weapon as it preemptively undermines religious extremism. History and modern scholarship make it clear that where people are allowed to practice their faith freely, they are less likely to be alienated from the government, and more likely to be good citizens.

In signing this letter, we have opted into a multi-faith coalition to urge you to strip FECRIS of its consultative status with ECOSOC. Indeed, per ECOSOC Resolution 1996/31, the consultative status of NGOs with ECOSOC shall be suspended up to three years or withdrawn in the following case:

If an organization, either directly or through its affiliates or representatives acting on its behalf, clearly abuses its status by engaging in a pattern of acts contrary to the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations including unsubstantiated or politically motivated acts against Member States of the United Nations incompatible with those purposes and principles.

FECRIS is a French-based umbrella organization that coordinates with member associations in more than 40 EU countries, and beyond. It was created in 1994 by a French anti-cult association named UNADFI and receives all of its funding from the French government (while its member associations may receive funding from their own governments). In 2009, FECRIS was granted “ECOSOC Special Consultative Status” by the UN.

During its history, FECRIS and its members have accumulated a great number of civil and criminal convictions for their actions that defame minority religions and spread hate speech against them.[1]

From 2009 to 2021, Alexander Dvorkin, head of the Saint Irenaeus of Lyons Center for Religious Studies in Russia, served as Vice-President of FECRIS. Since 2021, he has continued to serve as a member of its board of directors. Dvorkin, on behalf of FECRIS, has been a key architect of the crackdown on religious minorities in Russia and beyond, as he spread his anti-religious propaganda and misinformation to other countries,[2] including as far as China.[3]

Moreover, Alexander Dvorkin has been a driver of the Anti-West propaganda of the Kremlin for years, and directly and publicly attacked the democratic institutions of Ukraine after the Euromaidan protests, accusing them of being members of cults (Baptists, Evangelicals, Greek Catholics, pagans and Scientologists) being used by Western secret services to harm Russia.[4] Further, Dvorkin and other members and correspondents of the Russian FECRIS have been involved in the constant propaganda, which prepared the ground and justified the current war in Ukraine, as a war against Western decadence and a war to protect Russian spiritual values.[5]

During the first four weeks of the war in Ukraine, Russian FECRIS associations have been actively supporting the war and openly working with Russian law enforcement agencies to gather information on anyone who would oppose it or even just share information on the casualties in Ukraine.[6] At the same time, Russia has enacted a law that established a jail sentence of up to 15 years for any person “discrediting the armed forces,” which includes speaking of “war” instead of the official Russian term, “special military operation.”

Until now, no discipline has ever been taken against Dvorkin and/or Russian FECRIS associations for their actions that spread propaganda and catalyze discrimination and persecution of religious communities[7]. It is known and understood that FECRIS has known about the ideology and actions of its Russian members for years, and has continued to support them, nonetheless.

FECRIS as an entity must be held accountable for the activities of its Russian member associations for the following reasons:

While FECRIS has been alerted about the outrageous ideology and actions of Alexander Dvorkin and Russian member associations for years, it has kept Dvorkin on its board of directors, which elected him twice as Vice President, and has supported the associations all along, having never taken any disciplinary actions against any of them.

In fact, FECRIS has been actively coordinating as an entity with Russian authorities to trigger the crackdown on religious minorities since as far back as 2009—the same year it was granted “ECOSOC Special Consultative Status” by the UN.

The mere ideology and methodology of FECRIS, as a constant, is to use authoritative governments to trigger crackdowns on religious communities it stigmatizes as sects or cults, with no regard to their human dignity, liberty of conscience, and other fundamentals human rights.

In conclusion, FECRIS should be stripped of its ECOSOC consultative status at the UN. Its aims and activities are in complete opposition to the aims and purposes of the UN. Further, Russian FECRIS associates are actively supporting the war in Ukraine.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Respectfully,

Organizations

Bitter Winter, a daily magazine on religious liberty and human rights

Boat People SOS (BPSOS)

Campaign to Abolish Modern-day Slavery in Asia (CAMSA)

CESNUR, Center for Studies on New Religions

Committee for Religious Freedom in Vietnam

European Federation for Freedom of Belief (FOB)

European Interreligious Forum for Religious Freedom (EIFRF)

Gerard Noodt Foundation

Human Rights Without Frontiers

Jubilee Campaign USA

The All Faiths Network UK

The Center for Studies on Freedom of Religion Belief and Conscience (LIREC)

The Orthodox Public Affairs Committee (OPAC)

Ukrainian Association of Religious Studies (UARR)

Union of Councils for Jews in the former Soviet Union (UCSJ)

Individuals [With name, title, and affiliation for identification purposes only]

Greg Mitchell

Chair, IRF Roundtable

Chair, IRF Secretariat

Prof. Alla Aristova

Ukrainian Encyclopedia

Eileen Barker OBE FBA

Professor Emeritus

London School of Economics

Prof. Alla Boyko

Institute of Journalism, Shevchenko University of Kyiv – Ukraine

Keegan Burke

DC branch director

Alliance of Religions

Prof. Yurii Chornomorets
Drahomanov University – Ukraine

Anuttama Dasa
Global Director of Communications
International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON)

Soraya M Deen
Founder
Muslim Women Speakers

Nguyen Dinh Thang, PhD
Laureate of the 2011 Asia Democracy and Human Rights Award

Prof. Vitalii Dokash
Vice-President
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Prof. Liudmyla Fylypovych
Vice-President
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George Gigicos
Co-Founder and Chairman
The Orthodox Public Affairs Committee (OPAC)

Nathan Haddad
Coordinator
OIAC (Organization of Iranian American Communities)

Lauren Homer
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Gerard Noodt Foundation

Prof. Oleksandr Sagan
Vice-President
Ukrainian Association of Religious Studies (UARR)

Bachittar Singh Ughrha
Founder and President
Center for defence of human rights

Prof. Roman Sitarchuk
Vice-President
Ukrainian Association of Religious Studies (UARR)

Rev. Dr. Scott Stearman
UN Representative
Baptist World Alliance

Prof. Vita Tytarenko
Grinchenko University – Ukraine

Andrew Veniopoulos
Co-Founder and Vice-Chairman
The Orthodox Public Affairs Committee (OPAC)

PhD Volodymyr Volkovsky
Institute of Philosophy of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine

Martin Weightman
Director
The All Faith Network

Prof. Leonid Vykhovskiy
Khmelnytsky University of Law – Ukraine

Prof. Victor Yelenski
National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine

Former member of the Ukrainian Parliament
Honorary Member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

Footnotes

[1] “FECRIS and affiliates: Defamation is in their DNA”, an article by Willy Fautré, director and co-founder of Human Rights Without Frontiers
[International https://freedomofbelief.net/articles/a-roundup-of-convictions-collected-by-fecris-in-europe](https://freedomofbelief.net/articles/a-roundup-of-convictions-collected-by-fecris-in-europe)

[2] USCIRF report, 2020, “The Anti-cult Movement and Religious Regulation in Russia and the Former Soviet Union” <https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2020%20Anti-Cult%20Update%20-%20Religious%20Regulation%20in%20Russia.pdf>

[3] “USCIRF Exposes European “Experts” Who Support CCP Campaigns Against ‘Cults’”, an article by Massimo Introvigne <https://bitterwinter.org/uscirf-exposes-who-support-ccp-campaigns/>

[4] How the anti-cult movement has participated to fuel Russian anti-Ukraine rhetoric, an article by Jan-Leonid Bornstein <https://www.europeantimes.news/2022/03/how-the-anti-cult-movement-has-participated-to-fuel-russian-anti-ukraine-rhetoric/>

[5] Article on EIFRF website https://www.eifrf-articles.org/Why-FECRIS-should-be-held-responsible-for-its-Russian-members-activities_a238.html

[6] Anti-cult movement hunting pacifists for police in Russia: Back in the USSR, an article by Jan-Leonid Bornstein <https://www.europeantimes.news/2022/03/anti-cult-movement-hunting-pacifists-for-police-in-russia-back-in-the-ussr/>

[7] After March 30, 2022, after a series of published articles denouncing FECRIS links to Russian propaganda, the names of the Russian organizations disappeared from the list of members on FECRIS’ website. Although a member of the FECRIS board privately answered a



question by a scholar stating they had been very recently expelled because of the war on Ukraine, no official statement by FECRIS has been published to this date (April 6) confirming this expulsion.

Copies:

Ahmed Shaheed (UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of Religion or Belief)
Marija Pejčinović Burić (Secretary General, Council of Europe)
Dunja Mijatović (Commissioner of Human Rights, Council of Europe)
Michelle Bachelet Jeria (United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights)
Elisabeth Borne (French Prime Minister)

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

By Willy Fautré, Human Rights Without Frontiers

HRWF (13.06.2022) - Defrocked Orthodox priest Ioann Kurmoyarov faces up to 10 years in prison for allegedly discrediting the army of the Russian Federation.

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

Father Kurmoyarov banned

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

"This is another example of how Orthodoxy turns into banal paganism with its temples, heavenly patrons, icons of branches of the armed forces," Kurmoyarov [wrote](#) on his Facebook.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sudden disappearance of Kurmoyarov

After the arrest of the ex-priest on 8 June, he was formerly granted the assistance of a lawyer, Leonid Krikun, but in fact, a decision was quickly taken to incarcerate him without any assistance of his lawyer.

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

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

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

In short, Fr Kurmoyarov used his freedom of thought and speech to reassert the Biblical commandment “Thou shalt not kill” and condemn Russia’s war on Ukraine in the same way as Jesus did when he virulently criticized and expelled the merchants and the money changers from

the Temple in Jerusalem, accusing them of turning it into a “den of thieves” and a “house of trade”. Theology applied secular life.

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

FECRIS, Russia, Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and the War on Ukraine

HRWF (09.06.2022) - For years, FECRIS (European Federation of Centres for Research and Information on Sects and Cults), a French-based umbrella organization¹ that coordinates with member and correspondent associations in more than 40 countries, has been repeatedly denounced for its close and dangerous relationships with extremist branches and actors of the Russian Orthodox Church headed by the controversial Patriarch Kirill who is being heavily criticized for fully supporting Putin’s war on Ukraine.

FECRIS counted a large number of Russian associations amongst its members and correspondents, all headed by the Saint Irenaeus of Lyons Center for Religious Studies. It included the RATSIR (Russian Association of Cent²ers for the Study of Religions and Sects) and all of its affiliated associations. Many of them which were Orthodox missionary organizations and groups opposed to LGBT people and same-sex marriages, were directly headed by the Russian Orthodox Church.³

Alexander Dvorkin, former vice-president of FECRIS

From 2009 to 2021, Alexander Dvorkin, head of the Saint Irenaeus of Lyons Center for Religious Studies, served as Vice-President of FECRIS. Since 2021, he has continued to serve as a member of its board of directors.

Dvorkin, on behalf of FECRIS, has been a key architect of the crackdown on religious minorities in Russia and beyond, as he spread his anti-religious propaganda and misinformation to other countries,⁴ including as far as China.⁵

Dvorkin has been a driver of the Anti-West propaganda of the Kremlin for years, and directly and publicly attacked the democratic institutions of Ukraine after the Euromaidan protests, accusing them of being members of cults (Baptists, Evangelicals, Greek Catholics, pagans and Scientologists) being used by Western secret services to harm Russia.⁶

During the first four weeks of the war in Ukraine, Russian FECRIS associations have been actively supporting the war and openly working with Russian law enforcement agencies to gather information on anyone who would oppose it or even just share information on the casualties in Ukraine.⁷ At the same time, Russia has enacted a law that established a jail

sentence for up to 15 years for any person “discrediting the armed forces,” which includes speaking of “war” instead of the official Russian term, “special military operation.”

In April, FECRIS’ Russian member organizations were discreetly removed from its website

Until now, no discipline has ever been placed on Dvorkin and/or Russian FECRIS associations. It is to be understood that FECRIS knows about the ideology and actions of its Russian members for years, and has continued to support them, nonetheless. In April 2022 all of a sudden, after a series of articles were published on FECRIS and its Russian connections, all Russian organizations disappeared from the list of member organizations in FECRIS’ website. A member of the board of FECRIS answered a private inquiry by a scholar that they had been “expelled” or “suspended” in March. However no official communication was published (as of April 6) about this, and the Saint Irenaeus of Lyons Center for Religious Studies’ website (as of April 6) continued to state that the Center was a member of FECRIS.

More importantly, this “clandestine” removal of the Russian names from the list of members was not accompanied by any self-criticism of the support FECRIS has continued for decades to offer to Russian crackdown on religious minorities, nor of any acknowledgement of the anti-democratic nature of the ideology FECRIS and its then Vice President Dvorkin has continuously propagated in FECRIS events and under the FECRIS label.

Dvorkin and other members of the Russian FECRIS have been involved in the constant propaganda of the Russian Orthodox Church under Patriarch Kirill, which prepared the ground and justified the current war in Ukraine, as a war against Western decadence and a war to protect Russian spiritual values.⁸

On the other hand, over the years, FECRIS and its member associations have accumulated a great number of civil and criminal convictions for their actions that defame minority religions and spread hate speech against them.⁹

FECRIS as an entity must be held accountable for the activities of its Russian member associations for the following reasons:

- While FECRIS has been alerted about the outrageous ideology and actions of Alexander Dvorkin and Russian member associations for years, it has kept Dvorkin on its board of directors, which elected him twice as Vice President, and has supported the associations all along, having never taken any disciplinary actions against any of them.
- In fact, FECRIS has been actively coordinating as an entity with Russian authorities to trigger the crackdown on religious minorities since as far back as 2009.
- The mere ideology and methodology of FECRIS, as a constant, is to use authoritarian governments to trigger crackdowns on religious communities it stigmatizes as dangerous sects or cults, with no regard to their human dignity, liberty of conscience, and other fundamentals human rights.

Further reading

<https://bitterwinter.org/anti-cult-federation-fecris-china-and-russia-1-why-fecris-is-in-trouble/>
<https://bitterwinter.org/anti-cult-federation-fecris-2-anti-cult-models/>
<https://bitterwinter.org/fecris-china-and-russia-3-western-anti-cultists/>
<https://bitterwinter.org/4-fecris-and-anti-cult-cooperation-with-china/>
<https://bitterwinter.org/5-fecris-support-religious-repression-in-russia/>
<https://bitterwinter.org/6-russian-fecris-support-for-invasions-of-ukraine/>

¹ FECRIS was created in 1994 by a French anti-cult association named UNADFI and receives all of its funding from the French government while its member associations may receive funding from their own governments, including in Russia through the Russian Orthodox Church.

² Article on EIFRF website https://www.eifrf-articles.org/Why-FECRIS-should-be-held-responsible-for-its-Russian-members-activities_a238.html

³ USCIRF report, 2020, “The Anti-cult Movement and Religious Regulation in Russia and the Former Soviet Union”
<https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2020%20Anti-Cult%20Update%20-%20Religious%20Regulation%20in%20Russia.pdf>

⁴ “USCIRF Exposes European “Experts” Who Support CCP Campaigns Against ‘Cults’”, an article by Massimo Introvigne
<https://bitterwinter.org/uscirf-exposes-who-support-ccp-campaigns/>

⁵ How the anti-cult movement has participated to fuel Russian anti-Ukraine rhetoric, an article by Jan-Leonid Bornstein
<https://www.europeantimes.news/2022/03/how-the-anti-cult-movement-has-participated-to-fuel-russian-anti-ukraine-rhetoric/>

⁶ Anti-cult movement hunting pacifists for police in Russia: Back in the USSR, an article by Jan-Leonid Bornstein
<https://www.europeantimes.news/2022/03/anti-cult-movement-hunting-pacifists-for-police-in-russia-back-in-the-ussr/>

⁷ Article on EIFRF website https://www.eifrf-articles.org/Why-FECRIS-should-be-held-responsible-for-its-Russian-members-activities_a238.html

⁸ “FECRIS and affiliates: Defamation is in their DNA”, an article by Willy Fautré, director and co-founder of Human Rights Without Frontiers International <https://freedomofbelief.net/articles/a-roundup-of-convictions-collected-by-fecris-in-europe>

Strasbourg rules Russia's ban on Jehovah's Witnesses in 2017 is unlawful

Russia ordered to pay EUR 59,617,458 (\$63,684,978 USD) for pecuniary damage (mainly seized property) and EUR 3,447,250 (\$3,682,445 USD) in respect of non-pecuniary damage

[Link to ECHR press release summary \(7 pages\)](#)

[Link to full judgment \(196 pages\)](#)

JW World Headquarters/HRWF (08.06.2022) - On Tuesday 7 June, the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) released a landmark judgment against Russia in favor of Jehovah's Witnesses. The ECHR declared—6 votes to 1—that it was unlawful for Russia to ban Jehovah's Witnesses in 2017.

The court also stated that it was illegal to ban printed publications, periodicals and the official website of Jehovah's Witnesses. It ordered Russia to discontinue all pending criminal



Human Rights Without Frontiers FoRB Russia

proceedings against Jehovah's Witnesses, to release all those in prison, as well as to return all the confiscated properties or pay adequate compensation.

Russia was ordered to pay the applicants a total of EUR 59,617,458 (\$63,684,978 USD) for pecuniary damage (mainly seized property) and EUR 3,447,250 (\$3,682,445 USD) in respect of non-pecuniary damage.

Jarrod Lopes, spokesman for Jehovah's Witnesses states: "Jehovah's Witnesses around the world are thrilled to hear about today's comprehensive judgment against Russia. The Court vindicated Jehovah's Witnesses as law-abiding citizens who, as a result of religious discrimination, are being unlawfully prosecuted and imprisoned in Russia. We hope Russia will comply with the Court's direction to halt the nationwide persecution and to release all 91 Witnesses in prison. Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia eagerly await the opportunity to freely worship in their homeland as millions of fellow believers in over 200 other lands do."

Significant Facts

- The European Court stated that Russia "must take all necessary measures to secure the discontinuation of **all** pending criminal proceedings against Jehovah's Witnesses, including by reference to the recently amended guidance by the Supreme Court of Russia (see paragraph 126 above), and release of **all** Jehovah's Witnesses who have been deprived of their liberty."
 - **Why significant?** Usually, the European Court does not articulate what State authorities should do to implement a judgment. Moreover, the conclusion of a judgment is typically limited to the parties of the case. But in today's judgment, the Court makes a general statement about **all** Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia. This shows that neither the organization of Jehovah's Witnesses, nor any individual Witnesses constitutes a threat to Russia. This confirms that the Witnesses' beliefs and practices are harmless and deserve full protection, because they are not extremists
- The Court views Jehovah's Witnesses as a peaceful, legitimate religion
 - **Advocacy that their beliefs are true:** "Peacefully seeking to convince others of the superiority of one's own religion and urging them to abandon "false religions" and join the "true one" is a legitimate form of exercise of the right to freedom of religion and freedom of expression." (right to freedom of religion) (§156)
 - **Publications:** "The applicants' religious activities and the content of their publications appear to have been peaceful in line with their professed doctrine of non-violence." (§157)
 - **Website, jw.org:** Site content not extremist. And even if some of it was extremist, the authorities should have required to remove the harmful part instead of blocking it all. (§231)
 - **Individual believers, including Dennis Christensen:** The ECHR stressed that the Russian Courts "did not identify any word, deed or action by the applicants which would be motivated or tainted by violence, hatred or discrimination against others." (§271)
 - **Conscientious Objection and Blood Transfusions:** The Court reiterated that these are fundamental rights, which should be respected as part one's right to self-determination and freedom of conscience and of religion. (§165, 169)
- The Court strongly criticized the Russian authorities, asserting the authorities were prejudiced, showed bias, and "had not acted in good faith." (§187)

- “Evidence tainted by bias against Jehovah’s Witnesses.” (§180)
- “The forced dissolution of all religious organizations of Jehovah’s Witnesses in Russia was not merely the result of a neutral application of legal provisions but disclosed indications of a policy of intolerance by the Russian authorities towards the religious practices of Jehovah’s Witnesses designed to cause Jehovah’s Witnesses to abandon their faith and to prevent others from joining it”. (§254)
- Serious “procedural flaws”, such as the Court relying on biased expert reports selected by the police and prosecutors, instead of reviewing the publications impartially. (§252)
- Law on extremism drafted in such a broad and vague manner that it allowed the authorities to act arbitrarily against us. (§272)
- Russia violated several articles of Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms:
 - freedom of thought, conscience and religion (Article 9)
 - freedom of expression (Article 10)
 - freedom of assembly and association (Article 11)
 - Article 1 of Protocol No. 1 (the right to respect for property)
- Judgment for “Taganrog LRO and others v. Russia” (32401/10), was combined with 19 other applications filed by Jehovah’s Witnesses from 2010 to 2019. The total number of applicants is 1444, of which 1014 are individuals and 430 are legal entities (some applicants appear in more than one complaint)

Judgment’s Impact

- **Inside of Russia:** Although, Russia is no longer a member of the Council of Europe, the case facts took place well before Russia withdrew and was expelled from the Council. Russia has had the opportunity to respond to the arguments in all the cases. Moreover, the ECHR has linked this judgment to the recently amended guidance by the Supreme Court of Russia. Thus, it is obligated to respect its content, all the more so as the content of this judgment applies indistinctly to all Jehovah’s Witnesses.
- **Outside of Russia:** For all countries in Europe and elsewhere, the ECHR, which is the most effective international human rights court in the world, has made clear once for all that Jehovah’s Witnesses are peaceful people, whose beliefs and practices are harmless. It has shown that even though State authorities may dislike their beliefs, they have no right to review their legitimacy, as they fall in the private sphere of every individual. (§172)

Jehovah’s Witnesses in Russia

Jehovah’s Witnesses have been present in Russia since 1891. They were banned after the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917 and criminally prosecuted for practising their faith in the USSR.

After the USSR Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organisations Act was enacted in 1990, the RSFSR Ministry of Justice registered the Administrative Centre of the Religious Organisations of Jehovah’s Witnesses in the USSR. On 29 April 1999 that national religious entity was re-registered as the Administrative Centre of Jehovah’s Witnesses in Russia (“the Administrative Centre”), under Russia’s new Religions Act.

In order to carry out their religious worship and practice throughout Russia, religious associations of Jehovah’s Witnesses were formed into groups or communities, called “congregations”. They operated under the authority of the Administrative Centre, an

umbrella organisation for the Russian Jehovah's Witnesses. There were approximately 400 local congregations and 175,000 individual Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia. Their places of worship were known as "Kingdom Halls".

In January 2007 a deputy Prosecutor General sent out a circular letter to regional prosecutors, asserting that Jehovah's Witnesses represented a public threat:

"Various branches of foreign religious and charitable organisations operate in Russia, whose activities do not formally violate the provisions of Russian law but quite often contribute to the escalation of tensions in society. Representatives of foreign religious associations (Jehovah's Witnesses, Unification Church, Church of Scientology, etc.), followers of various Oriental beliefs, and followers of Satanism form branches that frequently carry out activities harmful to the moral, mental, and physical health of their members."

He directed subordinate prosecutors as follows:

"To check whether territorial bodies of the [telecoms regulator Roskomnadzor] ... properly execute their legal duty to uncover extremist material in the media belonging to religious associations (Church of Scientology, Jehovah's Witnesses, and other religious organisations that have their own printing facilities).

Recent cases of persecution of Muslims

A court in Ufa fined the imam for storing two copies of comments to hadiths

Sova-Center (05.06.2022) - <https://bit.ly/3NYgfkS> - On May 26, 2022, the Leninsky District Court of Ufa fined the imam of the religious group "Mahalla Consent-Rizo" Shamsiddin Sizhaev two thousand rubles under Art. 20.29 of the Administrative Code (storage of extremist materials for mass distribution).

The FSB of the Republic of Bashkortostan found two copies of the book "40 Hadiths of Imam Al-Nawawi" in the prayer room of a religious group (comments and explanations: Dr. Mustafa al-Buga, Muhiyi-d-Din Mistou). The fact that the books were lying in a prayer room with free entrance, from the point of view of law enforcement agencies, testified to their mass distribution and storage for mass distribution.

Comments on 40 hadiths of al-Nawawi were banned as part of 68 Islamic religious materials in 2012 in Orenburg, but in 2015 this ban was lifted. Nevertheless, back in May 2012, the Sol-Iletsk District Court of the Orenburg Region also recognized this book as extremist along with a number of other religious works seized during searches in the case of organizing a cell of the banned organization "Tablighi Jamaat" in Sol-Iletsk. After that, the book was included in the Federal List of Extremist Materials under number 1622 (recall that the collection of al-Navawi hadiths itself was banned in 2014 by the Nevyansk District Court of the Sverdlovsk Region and in 2018 entered the Federal List under number 4673).

In our view, there was no reason to prohibit these comments on the well-known collection of hadiths, as they do not contain any incitement or signs of incitement to hatred on religious grounds. Accordingly, we believe that Sizhaev was punished inappropriately.

We also oppose the prohibitions (and numerous attempts to ban) of collections of hadiths. As we have repeatedly pointed out, today's notions of tolerance do not apply to medieval Islamic literature, as it describes the era of religious wars and attitudes of the times of this era. It is

obviously impossible to rewrite the early history of Islam and the ideology of its founder, the prophet Muhammad, recorded by religious tradition in a certain form, and, equally, it is impossible to hide this layer from modern Russian Muslims.

Four new cases of followers of the Turkish theologian Said Nursi have been opened in Dagestan

Sova Center (31.05.2022) - <https://bit.ly/3Mqhvp> - On May 31, 2022, the Investigative Department of the Investigative Committee for the Republic of Dagestan initiated criminal cases against four Said Nursi followers under Part 2 of Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code (participation in the activities of an extremist organization) on involvement in the banned international religious association "Nurjular".

According to the UK, the suspects took part in the activities of Nurjular from 2008 to April 2017.

In March, three similar cases had been initiated against the residents of Dagestan; in May the approved indictments in these cases were sent to court. Similar cases were also initiated in January and April. It is worth noting that in 2021 one of the courts of the republic terminated a number of cases against alleged participants of Nurdzhular, accused under Part 2 of Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code.

We consider the Nurjular ban illegal. Recognition of his extremist organization in 2008 was the result of unreasonable prohibitions of the books of the Turkish temperate Islamic theologian Said Nursi - for promoting the superiority of Islam over other religions. In 2018 the European Court of Human Rights ruled that by prohibiting these books, Russian courts violated Art. 10 of the European Convention guaranteeing freedom of expression. We also believe that Russian Muslims studying Nursi's legacy do not constitute a single organization. Nevertheless, the Nurjular association is banned in Russia as an extremist organization, as a result of which Muslims reading and discussing Nursi's books are prosecuted.

In Nizhny Tagil, the imam was fined for distributing extremist literature

Sova-Center (13.05.2022) - <https://bit.ly/3QfeXg6> - *On May 12, 2022, it became known that back in April, the Tagilstroyevsky District Court of Nizhny Tagil fined the imam of the mosque "Makhal" Fanis Galeev (in some sources - Galiev) under Art. 20.29 of the Administrative Code of the Russian Federation (distribution of extremist materials).*

An inspection conducted by the prosecutor's office found 23 books included in the Federal List of Extremist Materials.

According to Galeev himself, he collected these books to study and then destroy: "There is a fine line. Today these are not extremist books, and tomorrow they are already extremist. This can be determined by a spiritual person, not secular. These books that have been discovered cannot just be thrown away. They need to be buried or burned."

The imam is a member of the Lower Tagil Council for Combating Extremism.

It is not known which books we are talking about, but we note that we consider many cases of banning Islamic literature illegal.

In Dzhankoy, an imam was fined for "illegal" missionary work

Sova Center (13.05.2022) - <https://bit.ly/3mjhhET> - *On May 12, 2022, it became known that the Dzhankoy Magistrate's Court under Part 4 of Art. 5.26 of the Administrative Code of the Russian Federation (carriage of missionary activities in violation of the requirements of the legislation on freedom of conscience, freedom of religion and religious associations) fined Imam Emir Medzhitov 20 thousand rubles.*

The offense, according to the court, was that Medzhitov "*carried out religious activities without being a member or head of a religious organization, and also did not have a document confirming the authority to carry out missionary activities.*"

As the parishioners of this mosque testified at the trial, the Friday prayer was held by different believers, as it is the duty of every Muslim.

Special Bimonthly FORB Digest (16–31.05.2022)

31.05.2022 - Five years after Jehovah's Witness ban, jailings continue

Five years on from the 2017 ban on Jehovah's Witnesses, prosecutors have launched criminal cases on "extremism" charges against more than 600 individuals, of whom more than 200 have so far been convicted. Nearly 60 have received prison terms ranging from one to eight years. Andrey Vlasov, who is registered disabled, was sentenced to seven years in labour camp. "The essence of the accusation boils down to the fact that after 2017 I remained a believer and profess the Jehovah's Witness religion," he told the court.

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

28.05.2022 - Maksim Zavrazhnov, a Nizhny Novgorod resident, received a six-year suspended sentence for participating in a peaceful religious meeting of Jehovah's Witnesses

Link to full text in Russian: <https://www.jw-russia.org/news/2022/05/301609.html>

On May 30, 2022, the judge of the Moscow District Court of Nizhny Novgorod, Azamat Ionov, sentenced Maksim Zavrazhnov to 6 years suspended.

The verdict has not entered into force and can be appealed. The believer pleaded not guilty. There are no victims in the case, but the prosecutor asked the court to sentence the defendant to 5 years in prison.

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

27.05.2022 - Russia expels Jehovah's Witness prisoner to home country

Link to full text in Russian: <https://www.kasparov.ru/material.php?id=629079DCDA4E8>

Dennis Christensen and his wife have arrived safely in his native Denmark. This happened on the day following his release from a penal colony where the believer spent five years, Kasparov.ru was told by the European Association of Jehovah's Witnesses on 27 May.

Dennis arrived in Russia in 1995, aged 22, as a volunteer in order to help to construct a building for Jehovah's Witnesses outside St. Petersburg. In 1999 he settled in Murmansk, where he met his future wife, Irina.

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

26.05.2022 - Dennis Christensen released from Russian prison and deported to Denmark

Link to full text in Russian : <https://www.jw-russia.org/news/2022/05/260859.html>

Dennis Christensen, along with his wife, arrived home safely to his home country of Denmark on May 25, 2022. This occurred the next day after he was released from a penal colony in Russia where he spent a total of five years.

"I'm very happy to be released from prison and reunited with my dear wife, Irina," said Dennis. "I want to thank the Danish government, especially the consular office in Moscow, for trying to help me. I am also grateful to my brothers and sisters in the faith who supported me and my wife spiritually, emotionally, and physically."

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

26.05.2022 - Pavel Popov, an entrepreneur from the Chelyabinsk Region, was handed a six-year suspended sentence for reading the Bible

Link to full text in Russian: <https://www.jw-russia.org/news/2022/05/261521.html>

On May 25, 2022, the judge of the Metallurgical District Court of Chelyabinsk, Maria Melnikova, found 45-year-old Pavel Popov from Yemanzhelinsk guilty of organizing the activities of an extremist organization. The court made it a crime to discuss biblical topics with friends.

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

24.05.2022 - A Court sentenced a woman, located in the Krasnodar Territory, to a four-year penal colony term for practicing her faith in Jehovah God

Link to full text in Russian : <https://www.jw-russia.org/news/2022/05/241452.html>

On May 23, 2022, Olga Marchenko, a judge of the Pavlovsky District Court of the Krasnodar Territory, sentenced 45-year-old Lyudmila Shchekoldina to four years and one month in a penal colony. The woman was taken into custody in the courtroom. The court equated her ordinary religious practices with participation in the activities of an extremist organization and involving others in it.

[**Continue reading**](#)

24.05.2022 - Jehovah's Witnesses were searched in Yaroslavl. A criminal case has been initiated

Link to full text in Russian: <https://www.jw-russia.org/news/2022/05/241131.html>

On May 19, 2022, one of Jehovah's Witness, Anton Kokovin, 31, was detained on the central street of the city of Yaroslavl. After a search and interrogation, a written undertaking not to leave was taken from the believer. On that day, officers searched at least 3 dwellings.

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

23.05.2022 - A Kemerovo Region disabled person, Andrey Vlasov, was handed a seven-year penal colony sentence for holding Bible-based discussions

Link to full text in Russian: <https://www.jw-russia.org/news/2022/05/231437.html>

On May 23, 2022, the judge of the Central District Court of Prokopyevsk Pavel Kotykhov found 53-year-old Andrey Vlasov guilty of organizing the activities of an extremist community and sentenced him to 7 colony codes. He was taken into custody in the courtroom.

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

23.05.2022 - An appeal filed in Khanty-Mansiysk reversed Andrey Sazonov's sentence and ordered the case to be retried

Link to full text in Russian: <https://www.jw-russia.org/news/2022/05/231629.html>

On May 19, 2022, the collegium of the Court of the Khanty-Mansiysk Autonomous Area-Yugra overturned the sentence of Andrey Sazonov and sent the case for a new trial to the Uray City Court by a differently constituted bench.

Two months earlier, Judge Ilnur Gilmanov of the Uray City Court found Andrey Sazonov guilty of organizing and financing extremist activities, despite the fact that the testimony of witnesses and the results of the examination refuted the charge. The believer was fined 500,000 rubles.

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

17.05.2022 - A Tomsk Court of appeals upheld Yevgeniy Korotun's sentence — seven years in prison for believing in Jehovah God

Link to full text in Russian: <https://www.jw-russia.org/news/2022/05/171049.html>

On May 16, 2022, a panel of judges of the Tomsk Regional Court chaired by Yuriy Krivoshein upheld the sentence of 52-year-old Jehovah's Witness Yevgeniy Korotun. By leaving the believer behind bars, the authorities deprived him of the opportunity to raise his minor son. The verdict has entered into force. Taking into account the time spent in the pre-trial detention center, Korotun will have to serve another 4.5 years in a general regime colony. The believer considers himself innocent and can appeal the verdict in cassation.

[Continue reading...](#)

15 Jehovah's Witnesses sentenced to prison terms since 1 January

HRWF (25.05.2022) – The release of the Danish Jehovah's Witness Denis Christensen yesterday after five years spent in prison is the tree that hides the forest. Indeed, the persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses goes on unabated in Russia. Two of them were sentenced to heavy prison terms on the eve of the release of Christensen: Andrey Vlasov, a handicapped person, to 7 years (!) and Lyudmila Shchekoldina to 4 years and 1 month.

Jehovah's Witnesses sentenced to prison terms in Russia in 2022 (Update)

23 May 2022: Andrey Vlasov, 53 years old (7 years)

23 May 2022: Lyudmila Shchekoldina, 45 years old (4 years and 1 month in a penal colony)

26 April 2022: Andrey Ledyakin, 34 years old (2 years and 2 months)

19 April 2022: Konstantin Samsonov, 45 years old (7 years 1/2 years)

18 March 2022: Valeriy Rogozin, 60 years old (6 years and 5 months in a penal colony)

Denis Peresunko, 54 years old (6 years and 6 months)

Sergey Melnik, 57 years old (6 years in a penal colony)

Igor Egozaryan, 57 years old (6 years in a penal colony)

07 February 2022: Yuriy Saveliyev, 68 years old (6 years + 1 year of restricted freedom)

02 February 2022: Anatoliy Gorbunov, 64 years old (6 years)

25 January 2022: Anna Safronova, 57 years old (6 years)

20 January 2022: Yevgeny Korotun, 52 years old (7 years + 2 years of restricted freedom)

20 January 2022: Andrei Kolesnichenko, 52 years old (4 years + 1 year of restricted freedom)

19 January 2022: Alexei Ershov, 68 years old (3 years)

17 January 2022: Maksim Beltikov, 42 years old (2 years)

Andrey Vlasov, a disabled Jehovah's Witness sentenced to 7 years in prison



Andrey Vlasov

On May 23, 2022, the judge of the Central District Court of Prokopyevsk Pavel Kotykhov found 53-year-old **Andrey Vlasov** guilty of organizing the activities of an extremist community and sentenced him to **seven years in prison**. He was taken into custody in the courtroom.

Addressing the court with the last word, Vlasov said: “My physical condition is limited . . . Due to stiffness in movement, without outside help, I cannot take care of my legs: put on socks, take care of my feet and toes. All this is done by my dear [wife] Natasha. I am in constant need of medical treatment and supervision.”

In July 2020, Ivan Sablin, an investigator with the Federal Security Service of Russia for the Kemerovo Region—Kuzbass, opened a criminal case against Andrey Vlasov. Ten days later, the FSB searched his house and workplace. The investigation went on for almost a year. In June 2021, the Vlasov case was submitted to the Central District Court of the city of Prokopyevsk. Although there is not a single victim in the case, the prosecutor asked the court to sentence the believer to 8.5 years in prison.

Vlasov spent two days in isolation, a year and 10 months he was under house arrest. Andrey said: “I am limited in movement, my life revolves on 30 square meters of an apartment.” Despite the fact that the believer never violated the detention regime, the court repeatedly extended his preventive measure. All this had a negative impact on his health, however, the court continued to restrict Vlasov from visiting medical institutions.

The verdict has not entered into force and can be appealed. The believer insists on his complete innocence.

In the Kemerovo Region, 14 Jehovah's Witnesses are persecuted for their faith. Three of them received suspended sentences. Sergey Britvin and Vadim Levchuk have already served their terms in a penal colony.

Russian law enforcers mistakenly interpret the usual exercise of the constitutional rights of believers as extremist activity. Although the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation banned the activities of legal entities of Jehovah's Witnesses, this court did not in itself prohibit the practice of this religion.

In the Krasnodar Territory, the Court sent a woman to a penal colony for four years



On May 23, 2022, Olga Marchenko, a judge of the Pavlovsky District Court of the Krasnodar Territory, sentenced 45-year-old **Lyudmila Shchekoldina to four years and one month** in a penal colony. The woman was taken into custody in the courtroom. The court equated her ordinary religious practices with participation in the activities of an extremist organization and involving others in it.

The verdict has not entered into force and can be appealed. Shchekoldina insists on her complete innocence.

Although Lyudmila Shchekoldina's health has recently deteriorated and she needs a surgery, the prosecutor asked the court to find the believer guilty under Articles 282.2 (1.1), 282.2 (2) of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation and sentence her to 4.5 years in prison.

The criminal case against Lyudmila Shchekoldina was initiated on April 23, 2020. A week later, [a series of searches](#) took place in the homes of Jehovah's Witnesses in the Krasnodar Territory, and Lyudmila also became a victim. The accusation against the believer was based on a report by intelligence agent Ilchenko that the woman tried to involve him in the activities of an extremist organization. This is how he described their conversations about the Bible.

The case of Shchekoldina was investigated by the investigative department of the Federal Security Service of Russia for the Krasnodar Territory for a year. On May 13, 2021, the case went to court. It was examined by Judge Olga Marchenko of the Pavlovsky District Court of the Krasnodar Territory, the same judge who sentenced one of Jehovah's Witnesses, [Vladimir Skachidub](#), to 4 years in prison.

Russian human rights activists and the world community consider the criminal prosecution for the faith of Jehovah's Witnesses incompetent and strongly condemn it.

Andrey Ledyakin sentenced to 2 years and 2 months in prison

On 26 April 2022, the Seversky City Court of the Tomsk Region sentenced **Andrey Ledyakin to 2 years and 2 months in prison**.

In July 2020, FSB and Investigative Committee officers, accompanied by two OMON fighters, arrived at Andrey Ledyakin's place of work, in the administration of Seversk, to pick up a believer for a search of his home. After the Seversk Investigation Department opened a criminal case against Ledyaykin in March 2021, he was forced to resign. Three days later, the court chose a preventive measure for him in the form of a written undertaking not to leave the place and proper behavior.

In June 2021, the Ledyaykin case was submitted to the Seversky City Court of the Tomsk Region. It was considered by Judge Yekaterina Soldatenko. The accusation was based on the testimony of FSB agent Kira Klisheva, who testified against 5 more Jehovah's Witnesses in Seversk. The prosecutor requested 4.5 years in a general regime colony for the believer.

Jehovah's Witness Konstantin Samsonov sentenced to 7.5 years in prison

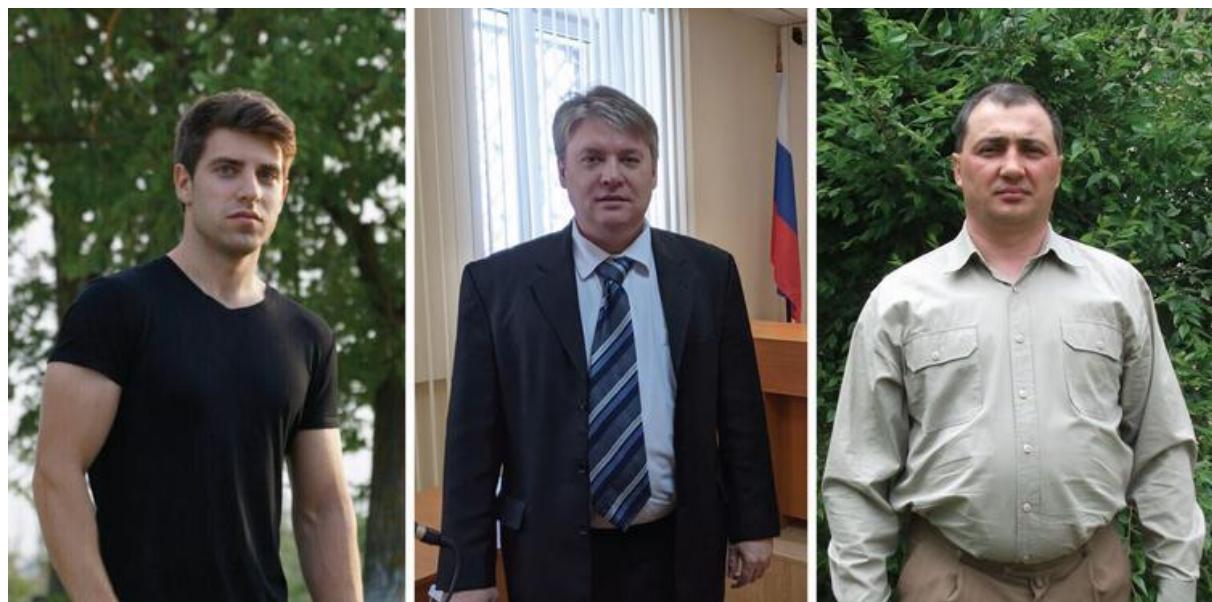


Photo: Alexander Akopov, Konstantin Samsonov and Shamil Sultanov

On April 19, 2022, Maksim Mazikin, judge of the Neftekumsk District Court of the Stavropol Territory, sentenced **Konstantin Samsonov to 7.5 years in prison**, he was arrested in the courthouse. Aleksandr Akopov and Shamil Sultanov each received a fine of 500,000 rubles, which has already been paid off on account of the time served in the pre-trial detention center. A written undertaking not to leave was taken from them.

Even before the initiation of a criminal case, Neftekumsk believers faced an [armed raid](#) during a friendly meeting, surveillance and repeated searches. In December 2018, Samsonov, Akopov and Sultanov ended up in a pre-trial detention center. A. V. Astakhov, senior investigator of the FSB department of the Stavropol Territory, accused them of extremism (part 1 of article 282.2 and part 1 of article 282.3 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation).

After a year of imprisonment, the court replaced their arrest with a ban on certain actions. For more than two years, due to the restrictions imposed, they have been forced to wear special sensors that record their movements. Akopov could not receive the medical care he needed, and Samsonov could not work in his specialty (his family lives off the savings made before his arrest).

The ECtHR, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention are just some of the organizations [condemning](#) the repression of Jehovah's Witnesses.

An appeal in Volgograd upholds the sentence of four Jehovah's Witnesses



In the photo: Denis Peresunko, Valery and Marina Rogozins, Sergey and Anna Melnik, Igor and Evgenia Egozaryan

On March 18, 2022, the Volgograd Regional Court upheld the conviction of **Valeriy Rogozin, Igor Egozaryan, Denis Peresunko and Sergey Melnik**.

In September 2021, the court of first instance sentenced **Rogozin to 6 years and 5 months** in a penal colony, **Peresunko to 6 years and 3 months**, and **Melnik and Egozaryan to 6 years** in a penal colony. The verdict has entered into force, but believers can appeal it in cassation.

When the criminal prosecution began, the wife of Denis Peresunko died of COVID-19, and the believer himself was placed in a pre-trial detention center for 5 months. He was on disability and the resulting stress exacerbated his condition. A long stay in the pre-trial detention center also seriously undermined the health of Valeriy Rogozin. Egozaryan and Melnik are raising their underage sons.

In 2019, law enforcement officers arrested four believers and accused them of organizing extremist activities, and later two of them — Peresunko and Rogozin — also of financing it. At the same time, recordings of religious meetings of Volgograd Jehovah's Witnesses, at which they discuss Bibles, sing songs and pray to God, were used as material evidence of their "guilt."

Source of the detailed individual cases: <https://jw-russia.org/prisoners.html>

A Danish Jehovah's Witness released after five years in prison

By [Willy Fautré](#), director of [Human Rights Without Frontiers](#)

The European Times (24.05.2022) - <https://bit.ly/3LIfYd3> - After five years spent in prison, Dennis Christensen was released this Tuesday 24th May. He is expected to be deported to Denmark on Wednesday morning.

Dennis Christensen has served five years of his six-year sentence. This is because his two years in pretrial detention counts as three years towards his sentence.

He was the first to be arrested and sentenced to prison following the April 2017 Russian Supreme Court ruling that liquidated the Witnesses legal entities. He has been in prison the longest, although in recent years others have been sentenced to longer terms, as much as eight years.

Dennis Christensen was born in Copenhagen (Denmark) in 1972 into a family of Jehovah's Witnesses.

In 1991 he graduated from the courses of carpentry and in 1993 he received a diploma of construction technician at the Higher School of Craftsmen in Haslev (Denmark).

In 1995 he went to St. Petersburg to volunteer in the construction of Jehovah's Witnesses buildings in Solnechnoye. In 1999 he moved to Murmansk where he met his future wife Irina, who by then had become a Jehovah's Witness relatively recently. They got married in 2002, and in 2006 decided to move south to Oryol.

On February 6, 2019, the Zheleznodorozhny District Court found Christensen guilty of extremism. He was sentenced to 6 years in prison to be served in a penal colony located in Lgov (Kursk region). On May 23, 2019, the Court of Appeal upheld this verdict.

Christensen Timeline

- [May 25, 2017](#), he was arrested and detained when heavily armed police officers and Federal Security Service (FSB) raided a peaceful weekly religious service of Jehovah's Witnesses in Oryol, Russia.
- May 26, 2017, he was ordered to be held in pretrial detention.
- [February 6, 2019](#), he was convicted and sentenced to six years in prison.
- [May 23, 2019](#), he lost his appeal.

2017 Russian Supreme Court Ruling

The April 20, 2022, Supreme Court ruling, albeit grossly unjust, simply liquidated all of the Witnesses' legal entities, Local Religious Organizations (LROs), in Russia and Crimea, declaring them "extremist". During the 2017 Supreme Court hearing, the Russian government

claimed that individual Witnesses would be free to practice their faith. However, the government's claim of allowing freedom to worship has been inconsistent with its actions.

- o Additional references ([link1](#); [link2](#))

Home Raids, Criminal Cases, and Imprisonment (Russia + Crimea)

1755 homes raided, almost one per day, since the 2017 Supreme Court ruling

625 JWs involved in 292 criminal cases

91 total in prison, [over 325 have spent some time behind bars](#)

- o 23 convicted and sentenced to [prison](#)
- o 68 in [pretrial detention](#) facilities awaiting conviction or have been convicted but awaiting results of first appeal

Longest, harshest prison sentence

§ Male: 8 years—[Aleksey Berchuk](#), [Rustam Diarov](#), [Yevgeniy Ivanov](#), and [Sergey Klikunov](#)

§ Female: 6 years—[Anna Safronova](#)

§ 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

§ The terms escalated in 2021. Previous years the maximum sentence was 6.5, but in 2021 it jumped to 8 years, as noted above

§ Number of prison sentences annually steadily increased: 2019—2, 2020—4, 2021—27

Photo : Dennis Christensen was the first Jehovah's Witness to be convicted on extremism charges in Russia.Courtesy of Jehovah's Witnesses

Special Bimonthly FORB Digest (01–15.05.2022)

13.05.2022 - Appeal in Nizhny Novgorod approved the sentence of Victoriya Verkhoturova - 4 years suspended

Link to full text in Russian: <https://www.jw-russia.org/news/2022/05/131350.html>

On May 12, 2022, the Nizhny Novgorod Regional Court upheld [the verdict](#) against Victoriya Verkhoturova from Nizhny Novgorod. A panel of judges chaired by Nikolay Kozlov found the believer guilty of practicing the religion of Jehovah's Witnesses, interpreting this as extremism.

[Continue reading...](#)

13.05.2022 - In Nizhny Novgorod, the Court sentenced Kirill Yevstigneev to 3 years suspended sentence for believing in God

Link to full text in Russian: <https://www.jw-russia.org/news/2022/05/130847.html>

On May 12, 2022, Viktor Ushakov, judge of the Leninskiy District Court of Nizhny Novgorod, found 42-year-old Kirill Yevstigneev guilty of financing the activities of an extremist organization and sentenced him to 3 years of suspended sentence. The believer can appeal the verdict.

[Continue reading...](#)

12.05.2022 - The Court of Appeal on Sakhalin upheld the verdict against five believers

Link to full text in Russian : <https://www.jw-russia.org/news/2022/05/121122.html>

The Court of Appeal on Sakhalin upheld the verdict against five believers On May 11, 2022, the Sakhalin Regional Court dismissed the appeal of Yevgeny Yelin, Vyacheslav Ivanov, Aleksandr Kozlitin and Sergey Kulakov and his wife Tatyana. The verdict has entered into force.

[Continue reading ...](#)

12.05.2022 - Five Jehovah's Witnesses lose appeal in Far East

Link to full text in Russian: <https://www.sova-center.ru/religion/news/extremism/counter-extremism/2022/05/d46248/>

On 11 May 2022, the Sakhalin oblast court upheld the sentence for five Jehovah's Witnesses—Evgeny Elin, Viacheslav Ivanov, Alexander Koslitin, and the couple Sergei and Tatiana Kulakov—based on articles concerning the arranging of activity of an extremist organization and participating in it (parts 1 and 2 of article 282.2 of the Criminal Code). In January, the Nevelsk city court of Sakhalin oblast found Elin and Kulakov guilty on the basis of part 1 of article 282.2 CC and sentenced them to six and a half years suspended terms of incarceration. Tatiana Kulakova, Ivanov, and Kozlitin were given suspended sentences of two years on the basis of part 2 of article 282.2 CC.

[Continue reading...](#)

12.05.2022 - The appeal in Primorye Approved the sentence of Sergey Melnikov: 3 years of suspended term for faith in Jehovah God

Link to full text in Russian : <https://www.jw-russia.org/news/2022/05/121023.html>

On May 12, 2022, the Primorye Regional Court of Vladivostok upheld the conviction of 49-year-old Sergey Melnikov for continuing to attend Jehovah's Witnesses' services and discussing the Bible with residents of Ussuriysk.

The verdict has entered into force. The believer still insists on his innocence and has the right to appeal against it in the cassation procedure.

[Continue reading](#)

09.05.2022 - Russia guilty of widespread desecration of houses of worship

Link to full text in Russian: <https://cutt.ly/IHz9gzm>

The aggressive attack by Russian troops has destroyed Christian church buildings and other sacred sites of religious communities of Ukraine. Since 24 February, at least 116 structures of religious significance (not counting adjacent buildings) have been destroyed already in at least 13 oblasts of Ukraine: Kiev, Dnepropetrovsk, Donetsk, Zhitomir, Zaporozhe, Luhansk, Lvov, Nikolaevsk, Odessa, Sumy, Kharkov, Kherson, and Chernigov. This is described in an account by the Ukrainian State Service for Ethnic Policy and Freedom of Conscience.

[Continue reading...](#)

06.05.2022 - RUSSIA: Religious opposition to war in Ukraine – prosecutions and detentions

Despite the official support for Russia's invasion shown by many religious leaders, most notably those in the Moscow Patriarchate, small numbers of clergy and laypeople in Russia continue to protest for explicitly religious reasons against the renewed war in Ukraine. They often face detention, prosecution, and the loss of their jobs in consequence. One, Fr Ioann Burdin, told Forum 18 he is appealing against being fined "so that life is not a bed of roses for the authorities and judges".

[Continue reading...](#)

05.05.2022 - RUSSIA: First known criminal investigation for opposing Ukraine war on explicitly religious grounds

Nina Belyayeva, a Protestant who is a Communist Party municipal deputy, has become the first known person in Russia to face criminal prosecution for opposing the war in Ukraine on explicitly religious grounds. During a meeting of Semiluk District Council in Voronezh Region she called Russia's invasion a war crime. She later wrote: "I realised that if I kept silent, I would not be able to respect myself. I wouldn't be a true Christian and human being." She fled Russia in early April.

[Continue reading...](#)

04.05.2022 - The oldest believer was released from prison on probation. The Court of Appeal approved the decision to release Valentina Baranovskaya

Link to full text in Russian: <https://www.jw-russia.org/news/2022/05/050853.html>

On May 4, 2022, the Supreme Court of the Republic of Khakassia approved the decision of the Ust-Abakan district court about the parole of 71-year-old believer. She was greeted on her way out of the colony by her many friends.

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

03.03.2022 - The Court in Birobidzhan sentenced the Postnikov spouses to suspended sentences for their convictions

Link to full text in Russian: <https://www.jw-russia.org/news/2022/05/031445.html>

On April 25, 2022, Judge Mariya Tsimarno found Oleg Postnikov and his wife Agnessa guilty of involvement in and participation in extremist activities and sentenced them to 5.5 and 5 years suspended sentence, respectively. This is the 16th conviction of Jehovah's Witnesses from the Jewish Autonomous Region.

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

Special Bimonthly FORB Digest (16–30.04.2022)

29.04.2022 - Maykop police continues raids on Jehovah's Witnesses for the second month

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2022/04/291504.html>

It became known that in the period from April 19 to 26, 2022, searches were carried out in Maykop at the homes of local believers at least at five addresses. Some of them were interrogated by the Investigative Committee.

On the evening of April 19, a group of seven law enforcers searched the home of a local resident. Her computer, laptop and phone were confiscated.

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

28.04.2022 - Debate over sanctions against Moscow patriarchate

Link to full text in Russian: <https://cutt.ly/IGGcpv2>

Calls for introducing sanctions against the RPTs (Russian Orthodox Church) and its leader, Kirill, have provoked hysteria among Russian officials. This is reported by Channel 5.

The deputy chairman of the Russian Security Council, Dmitry Medvedev, gave birth to a pathetic, propagandistic communication in defense of the RPTs and he spoke about "anti-Russian madness," which "demands sanctions against the patriarch of Moscow and all-Rus."

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

27.04.2022 - A Court sentenced a former City of Seversk Administration employee to two years and two months in prison for reading the Bible

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2022/04/271429.html>

On April 26, 2022, the judge of the Seversk City Court of the Tomsk Region, Yekaterina Soldatenko, sentenced Andrey Ledyaykin to 2 years and 2 months in a penal colony. The court considered the participation of a believer in peaceful religious meeting as extremism. He is taken into custody in the courtroom.

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

26.04.2022 - Seven Jehovah's Witnesses put on trial in Russian-occupied Crimea for studying the Bible

It is five years since Russia's Supreme Court outlawed the Jehovah's Witnesses, claiming that this world faith is 'extremist'. As well as persecuting a huge number of believers at home, Russia has also passed long sentences against four Ukrainian Jehovah's Witnesses from occupied Crimea and has just begun the 'trials' of a further seven people. All are accused of organizing and / or financing so-called 'extremist activities', with this otherwise known as reading and studying the Bible and sharing their faith with others.

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

25.04.2022 - An appeal in Vladivostok upheld the sentence of two Believers from Luchegorsk—a six-year suspended sentence for practicing faith in God

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2022/04/251437.html>

On April 21, 2022, the Primorskiy Regional Court in Vladivostok approved [the verdict](#) against Yuriy Belosludtsev and Sergey Sergeyev from Luchegorsk. A panel of judges chaired by Yevgeniy Oleshchenko found the believers guilty of practicing the religion of Jehovah's Witnesses, interpreting this as extremism.

The lower court sentenced civilians to 6 years of suspended sentence with a probationary period of 5 years and restriction of freedom for 1 year and 9 months.

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

21.04.2022 - A court imposed a large fine on Aleksey Smelov, a resident of Karelia, for believing in Jehovah God

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2022/04/211553.html>

On April 21, 2022, the judge of the Kondopozhskiy city court, Aleksandr Ivanov, found Aleksey Smelov guilty of organizing the activities of an extremist organization only because of his religious beliefs and sentenced him to a fine of 400 thousand rubles.

The verdict has not yet entered into force and can be appealed. The believer insists on his complete innocence. Although there is not a single victim in the case, the prosecutor asked the court to impose a fine of 500 thousand rubles on Smelov.

[Continue reading...](#)

21.04.2022 - Vladimir Skachidub's verdict of four-years-and-two months in prison for believing in Jehovah God was upheld despite an appeal filed in Krasnodar

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2022/04/211533.html>

On April 20, 2022, the Krasnodar Regional Court upheld the sentence of Vladimir Skachidub, a 60-year-old Jehovah's Witness from the village of Kholmskaya. The believer will have to spend more than 4 years behind bars.

On October 11, 2021, the judge of the Pavlovskiy District Court of the Krasnodar Territory, Olga Marchenko, convicted Vladimir Skachidub under two extremist articles, finding him guilty of participation in the activities of a banned organization and involvement in it.

[Continue reading...](#)

20.04.2022 - Neftekumsk-Based Jehovah's Witnesses convicted for reading the Bible: one received a seven-and-a-half year prison sentence, the other two received hefty fines

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2022/04/200905.html>

On April 19, 2022, Maksim Mazikin, judge of the Neftekumsk District Court of the Stavropol Territory, sentenced Konstantin Samsonov to 7.5 years in prison, he was arrested in the courthouse. Aleksandr Akopov and Shamil Sultanov each received a fine of 500,000 rubles, which has already been paid off on account of the tim

[Continue reading...](#)

19.04.2022 - Jehovah's Witnesses' homes were searched in Mari El, including the home of an 83-year-old woman. One believer was arrested

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2022/04/191328.html>

On April 15, 2022, nine dwellings of Jehovah's Witnesses from Yoshkar-Ola and the village of Silikatny (Mari El), as well as in Nizhny Novgorod, were searched. They affected at least 15 people, including an 83-year-old woman. The security forces detained 39-year-old Yevgeniy Plotnikov. He was sent to a detention center.

Searches of peaceful believers began in the morning and lasted from 6 to 8 hours. The security forces were looking for "extremist literature and computer and other equipment, through which communication was carried out with unidentified persons during worship.

[Continue reading...](#)

18.04.2022 - Astrakhan Regional Court Affirms an Unprecedented Six-Year Prison Sentence for Anna Safronova — One of Jehovah's Witnesses

Link to full text in Russian: <https://www.jw-russia.org/news/2022/04/180926.html>

On April 14, 2022, the Astrakhan Regional Court, by an appeal decision, approved the sentence of Anna Safronova, 56,—6 years of real imprisonment. The panel of judges, chaired by Nikolay Marevskiy, considered the discussion of the Bible and the collection of funds to help fellow believers extremism.

Thus, the record-breaking sentence for female Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia came into force. The believer still insists on her innocence. She has the right to appeal the verdict in cassation.

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

18.04.2022 - Seversk-based Sergey Belousov was given a three-year suspended sentence for attending peaceful worship services of Jehovah's Witnesses

Link to full text in Russian: <https://www.jw-russia.org/news/2022/04/180915.html>

On April 14, 2022, the Severskiy City Court of the Tomsk Region sentenced Sergey Belousov to three years suspended sentence. Despite the recent clarification of the Plenum of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation, Judge Yekaterina Soldatenko found the believer guilty of extremism only for participating in peaceful worship.

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

18.04.2022 - An Ussuriysk court sentenced 47-year-old Vitaliy Ilinykh to a two-and-a-half year probation for believing in Jehovah God

Link to full text in Russian: <https://www.jw-russia.org/news/2022/04/180908.html>

On April 15, 2022, Anna Zakharova, judge of the Ussuriysky District Court of Primorsky Krai, found Vitaly Ilinykh guilty of participating in the activities of an extremist organization and sentenced him to 2.5 years of probation for religious beliefs (the text has been updated, previously it was reported about a suspended sentence of 2 years) .

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

Moscow Patriarchate should be sanctioned for blessing the war

The Moscow Patriarchy of the Russian Orthodox Church is guilty of blessing the war and it should be considered one of the Kremlin propaganda tools. Its clergy, which blesses Russian war criminals, should be sanctioned together with Russian political and military leaders and excluded from contact with the Western world.

by Viktor Yelenskyi, a member of the Ukrainian Parliament

Euromaidan Press (10.04.2022) - <https://bit.ly/3yhUcdd> - On 13 March, Patriarch Kirill blessed the Commander-in-Chief of the Russian Guard **Viktor Zolotov** and bestowed him with the icon of Our Lady. On his part, Zolotov thanked the head of the Russian Orthodox Church: The icon “will accelerate our victory [over Ukraine],” he said.

The Russian Guard (*Rosgvardia, in Russian*) is infamous for its [brutal attacks on peaceful protesters in Russia](#) and is currently busy “denazifying” Ukrainian towns and villages after devastating bombings. Patriarch knows that well, but his actions are more than a mere justification for the Russian aggression.

In this way, the **Patriarch continues his long-standing battle with the so-called “collective West.”** It’s worth mentioning that the icon with which Kirill encouraged the invaders to wage war, is called the “August Icon of Our Lady”. It was painted during World War I to commemorate the miraculous vision to Russian soldiers of Our Lady, who allegedly promised Russians to win in the upcoming Battle of Warsaw in 1914.

In a church milieu where life is imbued with profound symbolism, this symbol looks very ominous and completely consonant with the Russian TV propagandists who threaten to spread Russian aggression into Poland, Germany, and beyond. The anti-Westernism, which the Patriarch shares with the Kremlin, is constantly pumped into the minds of Russians, and it looks not only sinister but hypocritical.

It is well known, that Patriarch Kirill is a passionate fan of **luxury Swiss watches, chic cars, and skiing in the Alps.** At the same time, he is a vocal critic of the “earthly and spiritually-impoverished West.” As cynical as his criticism, are Kirill’s annoying claims about Russia’s unique spirituality – he endlessly reiterates that only Russia is a truly “Holy Country.” This is not only absurd from a historical point of view but also blatantly inconsistent with the real life of Russian society.

The rate of premeditated murders per 100,000 inhabitants in Russia (8.21) is almost **seven times higher** than in Great Britain (1.2), which has the worst record among all Western European countries. Russian alcohol consumption per capita is the **fourth highest in the world**, and the suicide rate is the 17th highest.

By the **number of abortions** per 1,000 women between the ages of 15 and 39, Russia is way ahead of the West European countries that Russian propaganda portrays as a hotbed of depravity and degeneration. 37% of all pregnancies in Russia are ended in abortion, and it is much more than in the Netherlands (11%), Germany (9%), Ireland (4%), not to mention Austria (just 1%). The number of **abandoned children** in Russia is several times higher than in Western Europe, every year 10,000-11,000 children are abandoned there. Every year, about 500 children **are killed in Russia by their own parents.**

And according to the so-called World Giving Index, which measures charitable activity (volunteering, helping the needy, monetary support for the poor, etc.) **Russia ranks 126th**, the United States is second, and the same Netherlands is 13th. Finally, the **proportion of Russians who attends church services weekly** is lower not only than in Italy, Spain, Ireland, or Austria, but also than in Germany and, again, the Netherlands.

At the same time, the Moscow Patriarch is the only person among the Russian military, political, and propaganda elite who has managed to avoid Western sanctions so far. For some reason, many in the West considered the Primate of the Russian Church to be a religious leader, even if dependent on the government, but still a somehow independent actor. Himself, Kirill enjoys the image of at least partially significant political figure, although **there is no reason at all** to believe in it.

Kirill is trying to prove his usefulness to Putin by acting abroad as a *de facto* **representative of the Russian foreign ministry**. It corresponds to the opinion of Putin himself, who views the Russian Orthodox Church as a tool of his foreign policy. Isolated from Western countries, Putin is desperately seeking an intermediary between Russia and the Catholic world, and Kirill suits that need.

In 2019, Kirill made enormous efforts to prevent the [Tomos of Autocephaly for the Orthodox Church of Ukraine](#) (though he failed). In 2016, Kirill managed to convince Pope Francis to sign the so-called *Havana Declaration*, which described the situation in the world as very close to what is the official position of the Russian Orthodox Church. Regarding Ukraine, the Declaration spoke about the “schism between Orthodox churches in Ukraine” in line with the Kremlin propaganda. In return, Pope Francis included statements like “we are brothers, not rivals,” “longing for the lost unity and calling for its restoration,” and, perhaps, the Pope seriously believed that his interlocutor was also thinking in terms of unity around the Eucharistic cup.

However, **Kirill is very cynical regarding any ecumenical rhetoric**. In his youth, ecumenism used to be a means for him to travel abroad along and across the despicable world of consumerism, and live comfortably in the face of the hopeless Soviet life. Later in the 1990s, it was revealed that Kirill served as a **KGB agent with an alias “Mikhailov”** and reported to his superiors at the KGB headquarters.

Since the 1990s, he positioned himself as a **Russian nationalist and a harsh critic of everything non-Orthodox and not Russian enough**. Being elected as the 16th Patriarch of Moscow in 2009, Kirill at some point felt himself to be a great political figure and nearly an equal of the Putin-Medvedev tandem.

However, Kremlin promptly enough put him in his place. In fact, he has become the head of yet another Russian “natural monopoly,” whose potency and place in the power hierarchy are defined almost exclusively by the will of the Russian authorities. Kirill has exchanged the **right and obligation to be the defender of truth and faith** for money, privileges, and for being number six in the official state protocol. His blinding vestments and pious jargon should not deceive anyone.

And the goals pursued by the bodies of the Moscow Patriarchate abroad should not mislead anyone either. Its aims often are as far from Christian faith as Patriarch Kirill’s sermons on the war against Ukraine are far from Christian love.

Some time ago, the goals of the **Representation of the Russian Orthodox Church to European organizations** were described by its deputy head archpriest Anton Ilyin as following:

- To create the “Orthodox international group” in the European Parliament comprising members of the European Parliament from Bulgaria, Greece, Cyprus, and Romania, as well as Russian-speaking MEPs from Latvia and Estonia;
- To establish strong ties with the European People’s Party (EPP), the largest party in the European Parliament;
- To expand the interaction between the EPP, ROC, and the Putin political party “United Russia;”
- To achieve the inclusion of the Russian language into the list of the EU official languages.

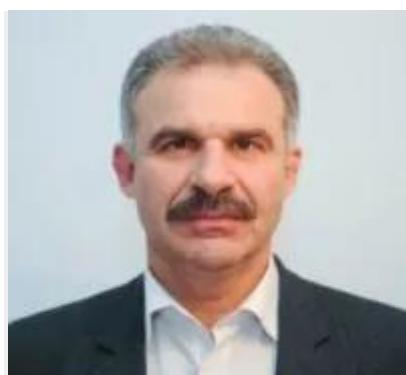
Therefore, the Moscow Patriarchate’s partners in the World Council of Churches, the Conference of European Churches, and various global and both governmental and non-governmental international organizations should be prepared for a surge in its activity. Needless to say, the Kremlin will support the Patriarchate’s foreign activities with **increasingly generous financing**.

The Moscow Patriarchate not only unconditionally endorses Russia’s bloody massacres in Ukraine but overtly inspires it as well. The Russian Orthodox Church is fully responsible for the incitement of war, the way it is waged, and for the war’s atrocities. The church hierarchs are no less guilty of crimes against humanity than the founding fathers of the Russian fascist ideology and Russian TV propagandists.

However, the Russian Orthodox Church is almost the only Russian institution that is not affected by sanctions, and its hierarchs can enjoy foreign travel and are involved in **dubious diplomatic activities**. It is a serious mistake on the side of Pope Francis and the Archbishop of Canterbury to discuss war matters with Kyrill, who speaks to them gently but immediately starts calling to destroy the Western civilization after he puts down the phone.

Related:

- [How the Russian Orthodox Church enabled Putin’s war against Ukraine](#)
- [Russian World: the heresy driving Putin’s war](#)
- [Moscow Patriarchate tells Russian troops: "Your task is to wipe the Ukrainian nation off the face of the earth"](#)
- [Leaders of Moscow Patriarchate in Ukraine shifting allegiance to Kyiv](#)
- [Tomos ante portas: a short guide to Ukrainian church independence](#)



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number of books, articles, and essays on religious freedom, religion and politics, and global religious trends. As a Member of the Verkhovna Rada of the 8th convocation he also drafted several Bills on Cultural Heritage, Sea Memorial, Church and State issues, and Creative Industries which successfully went through Parliamentarian voting.

Правозащитники требуют предъявить уголовное обвинение патриарху Кириллу

Европейские активисты обычно защищают религиозные группы от преследований со стороны государства, а теперь защищают общество от насилия, к которому подстрекает церковь.

English version [HERE](#)

[Аарон Роудс](#)/ Aaron Rhodes

The Moscow Times (25.04.2022) - <https://bit.ly/39qTb87> - Вилли Фотре и Патрисия Дюваль — европейские правозащитники, которые защищают религиозные общины от преследований государств. Они часто защищают традиционных верующих от слишком жесткой светской политики властей.

Но теперь они, наоборот, обвиняют патриарха Кирилла, духовного лидера Русской православной церкви, в подстрекательстве к агрессии и преступлениям против человечности из-за его откровенной поддержки вторжения России в Украину. Активисты призывают Международный уголовный суд предъявить патриарху обвинение.

Ссылаясь на юридический мандат Суда, Фотре и Дюваль [разместили](#) на сайте базирующейся в Брюсселе организации «[Права человека без границ](#)» (HRWF) обращение к прокурору МУС Кариму А. А. Хану.

В обращении содержится призыв к действиям «по привлечению к личной ответственности и уголовному преследованию Владимира Михайловича Гундяева, известного как Патриарх Московский и всея Руси Кирилл, за оправдание, пособничество и подстрекательство к военным преступлениям (ст. 8 Римского статута) и преступлениям против гуманности (ст. 7), совершаемых российскими вооруженными силами в Украине».

В подтверждение своих обвинений Фотре и Дюваль ссылаются на проповедь, произнесенную Кириллом в московском храме Христа Спасителя 27 февраля, через три

дня после начала вторжения. Как [сообщает](#) «Интерфакс», Кирилл молился Господу о сохранении «земли русской». «Земли, в которую входят теперь и Россия, и Украина, и Беларусь, и другие племена и народы».

«Как отмечается в [резолюции](#) Европарламента, Кирилл обеспечивал «теологическое прикрытие» войны России, направленной на включение страны в состав России или нейтрализацию ее как независимого демократического государства.»

Правозащитники говорят, что «патриарх обрушился с критикой на тех, кто борется против исторического единства России и Украины, назвав их „злыми силами“». Кирилл изобразил военные действия как войну со злом, сказав в своей проповеди 6 марта, что «мы вступили в борьбу, имеющую не физическое, а метафизическое значение», борьбу за «человеческое спасение». «В целом, — отметили они, — патриарх Кирилл поддержал „операцию“ Путина в Украине, приравняв ее к духовному очищению Украины, религиозной чистке и религиозному крестовому походу».

Отказ Кирилла от терпимости к гомосексуалам, кажется, лежит в основе его поддержки возвращения Украины в Святую Русь. В его проповедях с начала войны Донбасс, русскоязычных граждан которого Путин пообещал «освободить» от «геноцида» со стороны украинского правительства, изображается как земля, страдающая от пропаганды прав геев. В той же проповеди Кирилл сказал, что Россия останется верной закону Божию, и продолжил: «Мы никогда не потерпим тех, кто разрушает этот закон, в том числе стирает грань между святостью и грехом, и тем более тех, кто пропагандирует грех».

Как [сообщалось](#) в Newsweek, войну России против Украины можно охарактеризовать как войну за «верующих в РПЦ», от пагубных гей-парадов и прозападной идеологии. Все эти «угрозы» давно занимали и российских известных политологов, таких как философ Александр Дугин.

«На протяжении всей истории священные войны были одними из самых кровопролитных, поскольку они дегуманизируют врагов и узаконивают крайнее насилие и жестокость.»

Патриарх Кирилл внес весомый вклад в пропаганду в российских государственных СМИ и в публичный дискурс, в котором граждане Украины изображаются коррумпированными «пособниками нацистского режима», заслуживающими депортации или казни.

Фотре и Дюваль утверждают, что Патриарх Кирилл заложил духовную основу для оправдания агрессии против Украины и благословил всех, кто выполняет эту святую миссию, включая военные преступления и преступления против человечности, которые являются ее частью.

Правозащитники привели примеры из судебной практики МУС, в том числе [дела](#) против руководителей Конго, и заключили, что патриарх Кирилл действительно может способствовать преступлениям российских военных в Украине. Суд определил «подстрекательство» как «моральную или психологическую помощь соучастника основному преступнику, принимающую форму поощрения или даже сочувствия к

совершению конкретного преступления. Оказанное поощрение или поддержка не обязательно должны быть явными».

Россия не находится в юрисдикции МУС, так что обвинение Кирилла в соучастии в военных преступлениях маловероятно. Сотни русских православных священников подписали [петицию](#) с протестом против войны.

Но насколько значительно и тревожно зрелище религиозного лидера 95 миллионов россиян и многих других людей во всем мире, нарушающего правовые нормы глобального института, созданного для наказания и сдерживания военных преступников.

Мнение автора может не совпадать с позицией редакции The Moscow Times.

Photo : Pelagia Tikhonova / Moskva News Agency

Аарон Роудс

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The Russian FECRIS' support for the invasion of Ukraine

The Anti-Cult Federation FECRIS, China, and Russia.

6. The Russian FECRIS' Support for the Invasions of Ukraine

Article 5 of 7. Read [article 1](#), [article 2](#), [article 3](#), [article 4](#), and [article 5](#)

by Luigi Berzano (University of Torino, Italy), Boris Falikov (Moscow State University for the Humanities, Moscow, Russia), Willy Fautré (Human Rights Without Frontiers, Brussels, Belgium), Liudmyla Filipovich (Department of Religious Studies, Institute of Philosophy of the National Academy of Sciences, Kiev, Ukraine), Massimo Introvigne (Center for Studies on New Religions, Torino, Italy), and Bernadette Rigal-Cellard (University Bordeaux-Montaigne, Bordeaux, France).

Bitter Winter (27.04.2022) - <https://bit.ly/3xYwhiB> - Both in 2014 and 2022, the Russian FECRIS affiliates unequivocally supported Putin, contributing the conspiracy theory that “cults” were used by the West in Ukraine against Russian interests.

After the Ukrainian war started, the groups listed until the end of March on FECRIS's web site as FECRIS Russian affiliates unequivocally supported the war.

Some of the texts they published were truly disturbing, such as the comment [in an article republished on the website of Archpriest Alexander Novopashin](#), who is or was the Vice President of the FECRIS affiliate Center for Religious Studies, that Mariupol after 2014 was "occupied by pure, unalloyed Nazis," which is the usual Russian propaganda argument to justify the atrocities perpetrated there. It would be no defense, in this as in other cases quoted in this paragraph, that Novopashin only reprinted articles from Russian media. Reprinting is in itself a political act, and implies approval

On the same Novopashin's website, echoing again the usual propaganda, [another article explained that](#) "Ukraine's problem is fascism... fascism must be destroyed... Fascists cannot be defended. One of the main tragedies of Ukraine is that the neo-Nazis seized power and forced the army to fight for their ideology. Ordinary Ukrainian boys are dying—not for their land, no. No one takes the land from the Ukrainians, and even the leadership of the cities does not change when Russian troops enter there. The guys are dying defending the interests of the Nazis." Yet [another text republished on the same website](#), titled "May God Help Give Peace to Ukraine By the Hands of Russian Peacekeepers," argued that "in reality, there is no Ukrainian statehood. There is, on the one hand, a gang of thieves and international speculators, and on the other hand, a gang of fanatics and murderers."

As for the website of the St. Irenaeus Center, Dvorkin's own organization, [it summarized on March 18](#) an interview given by another leading Russian anti-cultist, Roman Silantyev, who mused about "the upcoming parade of victory over Ukrainian Nazism," and claimed that what the media described as school shootings by disturbed teenagers in Russia had been in fact organized by "the centers of information and psychological operations of the Armed Forces of Ukraine." Silantyev stated that "so far the majority of the population of Ukraine considers themselves Christians, but this was also the case in the openly anti-Christian Third Reich." In fact, he claimed, the real religion in Ukraine is a ritualized hatred of Russia with the intention of destroying Russia. For Russians, it was "better to hit first."

No friends of Ukraine: anti-cultists Roman Silantyev (left) and Alexander Dvorkin. From Telegram.

The Saratov branch of the Center for Religious Studies, still a FECRIS affiliate at that date, published [a letter to its supporters and friends](#) on March 2 claiming that "the West has long understood that we cannot be defeated in a war on the battlefield," but was waging a proxy war through the "cults," which contribute to spread such absurd theories as that "Russia is an aggressor" and it "bombs civilians." The Saratov anti-cult center tried to recruit police informants "to help in monitoring the activities of this kind of provocateurs. Please send screenshots, the data indicated by them (names and surnames, phone numbers and e-mail addresses) for further analysis, which is carried out by our anti-cult organizations together with law enforcement agencies of the Russian Federation" (by the way, at the time of this writing the website still mentions that the Saratov Branch is affiliated with FECRIS).

FECRIS may tell us that the Russian FECRIS branches have been expelled or suspended. However, at the time of this writing Dvorkin is still a FECRIS board member. More importantly, the aggressive attitude against Ukraine is not something the Russian FECRIS branches developed only in 2022. It went on for many years before the 2022 war, without any criticism by the FECRIS leadership.

The Russian policy on Ukraine was not created all of a sudden in 2022. It developed from 2004 on, when Russia built a narrative that [the "Orange Revolution" was an American-Western anti-Russian conspiracy](#), and continued in 2014 when the second popular revolt against the filo-Russian politician, then President, Viktor Yanukovych, [was again branded as an American plot](#), which justified the Russian invasion of Crimea and of Donbass, where the two pseudo-“independent republics” of Donetsk and Luhansk were proclaimed.

The role of the Russian FECRIS and the anti-cult movement was to insist that the American-Western conspiracy against Russia included “cults” as a tool to Westernize Ukraine. The importance of FECRIS’ role, of course, should not be exaggerated. “Cults” were certainly not the main theme of the Russian rhetoric about a Western plot whose aim was to separate Ukraine from Russia. However, the importance of the “cult” argument should not be underestimated either. As we have seen in our previous articles, Putin’s ideology derives from an old nationalist tradition [dating back to Ivan Ilyn](#) and the beginning of the 20th century, which promoted the idea that Russia is under siege and the West tries to destroy the Russian spirit through three main tools, the propaganda of democracy, the apology of homosexuality, and the “cults” used to undermine the Orthodox identity of Russia and the Russosphere. “Cults” are not the only element of this alleged conspiracy, but are a significant part of it.

Since the Orange Revolution of 2004 the Russian FECRIS devoted considerable resources to prove that “cultists” maneuvered by the United States were playing a key role in the creation of a Ukrainian identity separate from Russia. They mentioned three smoking guns allegedly proving the Western conspiracy.

The first was that Arseniy Yatsenyuk, who was Ukraine’s Prime Minister between 2014 and 2016, after Yanukovych was removed from the presidency, was a Scientologist, or at least he was “controlled by the CIA through Scientology,” as Dvorkin [told in 2014 a Serbian web site](#). “Behind the Ukrainian crisis, there is a secret plan of a group of religious cults and sects in which the political leadership of Ukraine itself is participating,” Dvorkin claimed. In [an interview published in his own web site](#), Dvorkin offered more details. Scientologists “put Yatsenyuk into a trance, pumped out all compromising information about him. And the person passed under the control of the Scientologists. Scientology concluded a secret agreement with the U.S. CIA; therefore, it is clear under whose control Arseniy Yatsenyuk is.”

That Yatsenyuk is “controlled by Scientology” has been repeated time and again. There is only one problem about this story, it is not true. Not even Tony Ortega, one of the most extreme anti-cultists and critics of Scientology in the United States and one who would normally believe all sort of anti-Scientology propaganda, bought Dvorkin’s story. From the beginning, [he wrote in February 2014](#), “we had serious doubts about that story, which was thin on details. For its allegation about Scientology, it pointed to Yatsenyuk’s Wikipedia entry, which claimed that Yatsenyuk, 40, was primarily involved in Scientology through his sister Alina Steel, 47, who lives in Santa Barbara and was supposedly an auditor and heavily into the church. But shortly

after the Dallas story appeared, that allegation was scrubbed from the Wikipedia entry in English (the assertion still exists in Wikipedia's Russian-language version)." Ortega found no evidence of Alina's involvement in Scientology, either, and her daughter dismissed it as "crap."

Perhaps because he became aware of criticism even within the international anti-cult network, Dvorkin later [offered the version](#) that "we cannot directly call Yatsenyuk a Scientologist. We can only say that, according to many experts, he had connections with them." But he insisted that, "There is a curious fact: As soon as the Kiev junta, which came to power as a result of a coup, where the prime minister is suspected of having links with Scientology, began to have problems, the director of the CIA arrived incognito in the capital of Ukraine and held secret meetings."

"The Atlantic" [also investigated the matter](#) and concluded that Yatsenyuk was not a Scientologist. "Despite popular online rumors that he is either a Scientologist or Jewish, Yatsenyuk identifies himself as a Ukrainian Greek Catholic," i.e., a "Uniate," as Orthodox call those who maintain a Greek liturgy but are united with the Holy See. But perhaps, "The Atlantic" noted, for Russian propaganda "it's a difference without a distinction." In fact, [Dvorkin claimed in 2014](#) that "Euromaidan is an explosive religious mixture. Secretly influenced by Scientologists. Uniates, neo-Pentecostal, neo-pagan; Baptists spoke openly. First of all, Euromaidan was Uniate. The Uniate Church is one of the aggressive parts of Roman Catholicism."

The second smoking gun was the fact that some Ukrainian anti-Russian politicians were Evangelical or Pentecostal. Oleksandr Turchynov, who was Acting President of Ukraine for a few months after Yanukovych's fall in 2014 and held other important political positions, is a Baptist minister. He is associated with Word of Life Ministries, a missionary organization founded in 1940 by Jack Wyrtzen (1913–1996), which has a considerable success in Ukraine. Very few people, even in the anti-cult camp, would call Baptist churches or mainline missionary groups such as Word of Life "cults." However, this is what Word of Life is according to the Russian FECRIS. They maneuvered to have it banned as "extremist" in Russia, as well as in the pseudo-republics of Donetsk and Luhansk. [Dvorkin's website still calls it](#) a "totalitarian cult," Dvorkin [acknowledges](#) that Turchynov has internationally recognized credentials as a Baptist minister, but claims he "preaches not like an average Baptist pastor, but much more harshly, manipulatively," and uses techniques of "manipulation of consciousness."

The Russian FECRIS also mentions that Leonid Chernovetskyi, another political opponent of Yanukovych, who was major of Kiev between 2006 and 2012 (and later moved to Georgia and became a Georgian citizen) was a member of the Embassy of the Blessed Kingdom of God for All Nations, known in short as Embassy of God, a Pentecostal denomination established in 1993 in Ukraine by Nigerian pastor Sunday Adelaja. The Embassy of God claims some 100,000 members in Ukraine and has expanded into several foreign countries.

Pastor Adelaja supported the Orange Revolution in 2004, something the Russians did not forget. After the Russian invasion of 2022, according to [his Facebook page](#), he was informed by the Ukrainian authorities that he had been placed on a Russian hit list, and had to leave the country. On the other hand, judging from the same Facebook page, Adelaja does not fit the profile of a rabid anti-Russian. He praised Putin for his opposition to same-sex marriage and criticized those who believed Ukraine should join the NATO.

Nonetheless, the fact that the Embassy of God has converted thousands of Ukrainians baptized in the Orthodox Church is enough for the Russian FECRIS activists to identify it as a “cultic” organization. The fact that Adelaja is a “black native of Africa” is also regularly mentioned, with easily detectable racist implications. “Ukrainian Neo-Pentecostals” such as those in the Embassy of God, [Dvorkin’s website proclaimed](#), are not Ukrainian at all. They are “Americans” and evidence that “the West has been diligently introducing, encouraging and financing cultic groups in Russia and the post-Soviet space.”

The third “evidence” the Russian FECRIS organizations offer of the presence of “cults” infiltrated by the West into Ukraine with anti-Russian purposes is that some of the right-wing Ukrainian nationalists opposing Russia are neo-pagans or even “Satanists.” Speaking [in November 2014 at a conference in Stavropol](#), Dvorkin stated that “the neo-pagans were very active on the Maidan,” and that “the neo-pagan project is also sponsored from abroad. This is a very, very serious danger.” At the same conference, as Dvorkin’s website reported, Metropolitan Kirill of Stavropol and Nevinnomysk, also spoke, and claimed that neo-pagan movements have their “funding roots in the West: this is the work of special services, this is the same as the creation of the NGOs that prepared the Maidan.”

Neo-pagans who dream to restore pre-Christian traditional religions do exist in Ukraine, as they exist in Russia and other countries. [Scholars have evaluated](#) their strength in Ukraine between 0.1 and 0.2% of the population. The interest of mentioning Ukrainian neo-pagans for the Russian FECRIS affiliates is that some of them (not all) have right-wing political ideas, and neo-pagan symbols have been used by nationalist militias. [Specialized scholars](#) have warned that, apart from the symbols, neo-pagans are a minority (as are neo-Nazis, although they do exist) within nationalist Ukrainian militias, and that [there are as many, if not more](#), neo-Nazis and right-wing neo-pagans fighting for, rather than against, Russia in the Donbass war.

Yet, the Russian FECRIS affiliates offered their supports as “experts of cults” to the campaign depicting Ukraine as dominated by “neo-pagan Nazis” busy destroying its Christian, Orthodox, and Russian identity. They added the preposterous claim that Ukrainian neo-pagans are “sponsored” and “funded” by “the West.” In 2021, Father Alexander Kuzmin, signing as Executive Secretary of the umbrella organization gathering the various FECRIS affiliates in Russia, [insisted about the alleged connection](#) between neo-pagan movements and Western intelligence services. He wrote that “some ten years ago, when we, experts on cults, talked about the fact that intelligence services were involved in destructive cults, their creation, promotion and direction of their missionary activity, it sounded like exotic, like declassified counterintelligence information. Now information wars are not surprising to anyone, just as it is not surprising that cults have long become an instrument of political struggle.”

Even Satanists were said to be part of the picture. In 2014, [Dvorkin’s website reported](#) that a “Church of Satan” was building a place of worship in the Ukrainian village of Pasty’rskoe. It claimed the temple was being built with the authorization of Ukrainian authorities, and commented that Ukraine was becoming a “laboratory for cults,” and “they are trying in every possible way to reduce the popularity of Orthodoxy.” Unmentioned was that Satanists exist in Russia too. In 2016, a Satanic Church of Russia, established in 2013 and whose leader goes by the name of Oleg Sataninsky [was legally registered in Russia](#)—perhaps because Sataninsky expressed his support for Putin’s anti-extremism and anti-proselytization laws.

The triple infiltration into Ukraine, allegedly organized by “the West,” of the Church of Scientology, Evangelical or Pentecostal “totalitarian cults” such as Word of Life or the Embassy of God, and neo-pagans and Satanists, was used by the Russian FECRIS affiliates to slander the Orange Revolution and Euromaidan. The Greek Catholic Church was also attacked as an accomplice. “Maidan was compared by many experts of cults to a well-organized destructive cult,” [Dvorkin’s website proclaimed](#). In 2016, Dvorkin [gave a lecture](#) on “Totalitarian Cults and Color Revolutions,” where he explained that “the first Maidan [2004] was made by neo-Pentecostals and they got their own mayor of Kyiv, Leonid Chernovetskyi. The composition of the second ‘Maidan’ is more complex: the Uniate [Greek Catholic] Church, Scientologists, and neo-pagans participated in it.”

FECRIS Russian affiliates did not create the propaganda against Ukraine’s democratic movement. Yet, as “experts on cults” they provided the necessary caution to the theory that “cults” were one of the tools “the West” used to organize this movement, whose aim is to separate Ukraine from Russia. In 2014, they also immediately went to the newly proclaimed pseudo-republics of Donetsk and Luhansk, where “cults” and several Evangelical and Pentecostal churches were banned [with the cooperation and applause of the Russian FECRIS](#), giving a taste of what would happen in a “Russified” Ukraine.

*Photo : No friends of Ukraine: anti-cultists Roman Silantyev (left) and Alexander Dvorkin.
From Telegram.*

Seven Jehovah’s Witnesses put on trial in Russian-occupied Crimea for studying the Bible

By Halya Coynash

KHPG (26.04.2022) - <https://bit.ly/3Km8rQp> - It is five years since Russia’s Supreme Court outlawed the Jehovah’s Witnesses, claiming that this world faith is ‘extremist’. As well as persecuting a huge number of believers at home, Russia has also passed long sentences against four Ukrainian Jehovah’s Witnesses from occupied Crimea and has just begun the ‘trials’ of a further seven people. All are accused of organizing and / or financing so-called ‘extremist activities’, with this otherwise known as reading and studying the Bible and sharing their faith with others.

On 9 April 2022, a Russian court revoked [the first and only acquittal](#) in all of these five years of a Ukrainian Jehovah’s Witness and sent his ‘case’ back for retrial. Dmitry (or in Ukrainian, Dmytro) Barmakin is from Alushta in Crimea, however he and his wife, Yelena moved to Vladivostok in the Far East of Russia to care for Yelena’s sick mother. He was arrested, after an armed search of his home, in July 2018 and remanded in custody for well over a year. The charge was the more serious “organizing the activities of an extremist organization” (under Article 282.2 § 1 of Russia’s criminal code), however the case was sent back to the prosecutor

once because of the vague nature of the indictment. On 22 November 2021, Barmakin was acquitted by judge Stanislav Salnikov from the Pervorechenskiy District Court in Vladivostok.

This was one of very few acquittals of Jehovah's Witnesses, and the only one involving a believer with Ukrainian citizenship. On 8 April, the Prymorye Regional Court, under presiding 'judge' Tetiana Myshkina, overturned the ruling in Barmakin's case and ordered a retrial.

It was also learned in early April that two 'trials' have begun in occupied Crimea of Jehovah's Witnesses. On 4 April, 'judge' **Vladimir Romanenko** from the Russian occupation Yalta City Court began hearings into the charges against **Taras Kuzio**; his wife **Darya Kuzio; Pyotr Zhiltsov; Serhiy Lyulin** and **Tadevos Manukian** (the last of these in his absence).

Taras Kuzio (b. 1978) was first mentioned as facing charges after armed searches on 20 March 2019, however at that stage it was only **Artem Gerasimov** who ended up 'on trial' (and sentenced to 6.5 years' imprisonment). On 4 March 2021, 'investigator' **V.A. Novikov** initiated criminal proceedings against Kuzio under Article 282.3 § 1 ('financing an extremist organization'), although he is now, seemingly, also charged with 'organizing' under Article 282.2 § 1. He has been under house arrest since March 2021.

On 29 July, **Petro (or Pyotr) Zhiltsov** (b. 1987) was also detained. He had earlier been interrogated as a 'witness' in the case against Kuzio, however Novikov initiated identical charges (under Article 282.2 § 1), accusing Zhiltsov of both financing and of organizing the so-called 'activities of an extremist organization'. He too faces a sentence of up to 10 years for practising his faith.

Taras Kuzio's wife, **Darya Kuzio** (b. 1982), was also charged, as were **Serhiy Lyulin** (b. 1984) and Tadevos Manukian, seemingly, only with 'organizing', not 'financing' a supposed 'extremist organization' (under Article 282.2 § 1).

As reported, 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 was shortly afterwards remanded in custody, and spent 203 days in the notorious Simferopol SIZO [remand prison], being held for most of that time in a cell with renowned Crimean Tatar civic leader and journalist Nariman Dzhelyal. Since 1 March, he has been under house arrest.

On 2 August, charges were initiated of 'organizing the activities of an extremist organization' (under Article 282.2 § 1) against two men: **Oleksandr Lytvyniuk** (b. 1960) and **Oleksandr Dubovenko** (b. 1973). The charges, which carry a sentence of up to 10 years' imprisonment, are over a Zoom conference which **Vitaly Vlasov**, 'the investigator' implicated in the falsified charges and torture against **Nariman Dzhelyal** and Ukrainian journalist **Vladislav Yesypenko**, claims was to "attract new members of a banned organization".

Their 'trial' began at the occupation Armyansk City Court on 5 April.

Judging by previous 'trials' there is every reason for concern that new long sentences could be passed. Four men are already serving sentences of six or more years for their faith.

Serhiy Filatov (b. 1972) was arrested during a 'mass operation' against believers in Dzhankoy from 15-16 2018. Filatov's 'trial' took place in the Russian-controlled Dzhankoy District Court,

with the prosecution [claiming](#) that Filatov had “undermined the foundations of the constitutional order and the security of the state”, by being the leader of a religious organization. On 5 March 2020, [he was sentenced](#) by ‘judge’ **Maria Yermakova** to six years’ imprisonment in a medium security prison colony. That sentence against the 47-year-old father of four [was then upheld](#) by ‘judge’ **Edward Belousov** of the Crimean High Court on 26 May 2020. Belousov is one of eight ‘judges’ and enforcement officers [recently placed](#) on the EU’s sanctions list.

Artem Gerasimov (b. 1985) from Yalta was arrested on 20 March 2019 during a second wave of armed raids on Jehovah’s Witnesses in occupied Crimea. It seems likely that it was because of Filatov’s sentence on the same day, that ‘judge’ **Vladimir Romanenko** from the Yalta City Court initially ‘only’ imposed a massive fine on Gerasimov, unlike the 6.5 year real sentence demanded by prosecutor **Oksana Chuchuyeva**. The fine was challenged by the prosecutor, and it was that appeal which the ‘High Court’ on 4 June allowed, [imposing instead a six-year sentence](#).

Viktor Stashevsky (b. 1966) is a father of two from Sevastopol, and was also caring for his elderly mother. [He was sentenced](#) by the ‘Gagarin District Court’ on 23 March 2021 to six and a half years’ imprisonment on the same ‘organizing extremist activities’ (Article 282.2 § 1) charge, and taken into custody in the courtroom. The ‘judge’ in the case was **Pavel Krylo** who has been involved in at least one other politically-motivated sentence ([against Ihor Movenko](#)). The sentence was upheld on 10 August 2021 by ‘judge’ **Vladimir Avkhimov** from the occupation ‘Sevastopol Municipal Court’.

Igor Schmidt (b. 1972)

Schmidt is one of four believers from Sevastopol who were [arrested and remanded in custody](#) after armed searches on 1 October 2020. **Yevhen Zhukov; Volodymyr Maladyka** and **Volodymyr Sakada** are facing the same ‘organizing the activities of an extremist organization’ charge under Article 282.2 § 1, with their ‘trial’ now underway.

‘Prosecutor’ **V.S. Yazev** had demanded a 7-year sentence, and ‘judge’ **Lyudmila Petrovna Tumaikina** from the Gagarin District Court in occupied Sevastopol [passed](#) a sentence of six years on 22 October 2021 , with this upheld on 17 January 2022.

On 16 February 2022, **Artem Shabliy** (b. 1990) [was found guilty](#) of the lesser charge of so-called ‘participation in an extremist organization’ (under Article 282.2 § 2) and given a two-year suspended sentence.

Russia cannot alter the nature of its invasion of Ukraine by hiding behind terms like ‘special military operation’, and the use of terms like ‘extremism’ cannot change the fact that Russia is violating its own constitution, through its flagrant religious persecution of Jehovah’s Witnesses and others. It is also in clear violation of international law through its application of repressive legislation to arrest and try believers in illegally occupied Crimea.

Photo : Dmytro Barmakin Photo The Jehovah’s Witnesses’ website jw-russian.org

Human rights activists call for indictment of Russian Patriarch Kirill

European activists who usually defend religious groups from state persecution and now defending the public from church-incited violence

By Aaron Rhodes

The Moscow Times (22.04.2022) - <https://bit.ly/36EE9uI> - Willy Fautré and Patricia Duval are European human rights advocates known for defending religious communities from persecution and interference by state authorities, often defending traditional believers from rigidly secular government policies.

But now they are accusing Patriarch Kirill, the spiritual leader of the Russian Orthodox Church, of inciting aggression and crimes against humanity by his outspoken support for Russia's invasion of Ukraine and urging his indictment by the International Criminal Court (ICC). (Disclosure: I have cooperated closely with both.)

Citing the Court's legal mandate, Fautré and Duval posted on the website of [Human Rights Without Frontiers](#) (HRWF), the Brussels-based organization Fautré co-founded and has led since 1989, an appeal to ICC Prosecutor Karim A. A. Khan. The appeal calls for actions "to hold personally accountable and prosecute Vladimir Mikailovitch Goundiaiev, known as Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia, for inspiring, inciting, justifying, aiding and abetting war crimes (Art. 8 of the Rome Statute) and crimes against humanity (Art. 7) perpetrated and being perpetrated by the Russian armed forces in Ukraine."

In support of their charges, Fautré and Duval cite a sermon Kirill delivered at Moscow's Cathedral of Christ the Savior on Feb. 27, three days after the invasion began. As documented by the Russian state [Interfax](#) service, Kirill prayed for the Lord to preserve the Russian land... "a land which now includes Russia and Ukraine and Belarus and other tribes and peoples." As noted in a European Parliament [Resolution](#), Kirill provided "theological cover" for Russia's war aimed at absorbing the country within a greater Russia or neutralizing it as an independent democratic state.

The human rights defenders say that "the Patriarch castigated those who fight against the historical unity of Russia and Ukraine, targeting them as the 'evil forces'." Kirill has portrayed the military actions as a war against evil, saying in his sermon on March 6 that "we have entered into a struggle that has not a physical but a metaphysical significance," a fight for "human salvation." "All in all," they noted, "Patriarch Kirill has backed [Russian President] Putin's purifying 'operation' in Ukraine by equating it to a spiritual purification of Ukraine, a religious cleansing operation and religious crusade."

Kirill's rejection of tolerance for homosexuality seems to be at the heart of his support for bringing Ukraine back into Holy Russia. His sermons since the beginning of the war portray the Donbas, whose Russian-speaking citizens Putin has vowed to "liberate" from allegedly genocidal attacks by the Ukrainian government, as being subjected to pro-gay rights propaganda

and policies they reject on religious grounds. In the same sermon, Kirill said that Russia would remain faithful to God's law and continued, "we will never put up with those who destroy this law, including blurring the line between holiness and sin, and ever more so with those who propagandize sin."

As [reported](#) in Newsweek earlier, Russia's war against Ukraine can be characterized as a war to save people remaining faithful to the beliefs of the Russian Orthodox Church from pernicious pro-gay rights parades and ideology promoted by Western governments. This has been a longstanding preoccupation on the part of Russia's Eurasianist political influencers like philosopher Alexander Dugin.

Throughout history, holy wars have been among the bloodiest, as they dehumanize enemies and legitimize extreme violence and cruelty. Patriarch Kirill has powerfully contributed to Russian state media propaganda and public discourse in which Ukrainian civilians are depicted as corrupt "accomplices to the Nazi regime" deserving of being deported or summarily executed — crimes against humanity that have now been widely documented.

Fautré and Duval argue that Patriarch Kirill laid the spiritual foundation to justify the aggression against Ukraine and blessed everyone carrying out this holy mission, including the war crimes and the crimes against humanity that are part of it.

Fautré and Duval cite ICC jurisprudence from the Bemba et al. case in 2016 suggesting that Patriarch Kirill may indeed be abetting the Russian military's war crimes in Ukraine. The Court defined "abetting" as "the moral or psychological assistance of the accessory to the principal perpetrator, taking the form of encouragement of or even sympathy for the commission of the particular offence. The encouragement or support shown need not be explicit."

Hundreds of Russian Orthodox priests have [signed a petition](#) objecting to the war. But these factors do not make any less significant, and disturbing, the spectacle of the religious leader of 95 million Russians, and many more worldwide, violating the legal norms of a global institution set up to punish, and deter war criminals.

Photo : Pelagia Tikhonova / Moskva News Agency

Patriarch Kiril should be prosecuted by the International Criminal Court (ICC), according to a NGO report

HRWF's contribution to the investigation of the International Criminal Court on the potential criminal liability of the Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church for aiding and abetting the commission of war crimes and crimes against humanity

**By Willy Fautré, director of Human Rights Without Frontiers, and Patricia Duval,
attorney**

Human Rights Without Frontiers, a Brussels-based NGO, appeals to the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, Karim A. A. Khan QC, to hold personally accountable and prosecute Vladimir Mikhaïlovitch Goundiaiev, known as Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia,

for inspiring, inciting, justifying, aiding and abetting war crimes (Art. 8 of the Rome Statute) and crimes against humanity (Art. 7) perpetrated and being perpetrated by the Russian armed forces in Ukraine.

The International Criminal Court (ICC) is currently busy documenting and evidencing war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in Ukraine, and identifying the perpetrators to be held accountable for the said crimes.

The prosecution of Patriarch Kirill falls within Article 25 of the Rome Statute – Individual criminal responsibility – which provides:

3. In accordance with this Statute, a person shall be criminally responsible and liable for punishment for a crime within the jurisdiction of the Court if that person:
(...)
(c) For the purpose of facilitating the commission of such a crime, **aids, abets or otherwise assists** in its commission or its attempted commission, including providing the means for its commission;

On 7 April 2002, **the European Parliament adopted a Resolution** about “the increasing repression in Russia, including the case of Alexei Navalny,” in which it condemned the role of Moscow Patriarch Kirill in Russia’s war against Ukraine.:

“Condemns the role of Moscow Patriarch Kirill, head of the Russian Orthodox Church, in providing theological cover for Russia’s aggression against Ukraine; praises the courage of the 300 priests of the Russian Orthodox Church who signed a letter condemning the aggression and expressed their grief over the ordeal of the Ukrainian people, calling for an end to the war.”¹⁰

I - HOW DID PATRIARCH KIRILL AID, ABET OR ASSIST IN THE COMMISSION OF THE SAID CRIMES?

On 24 February 2022, President Putin of the Russian Federation ordered its army to simultaneously cross the northern, eastern and southern borders of Ukraine, a sovereign State, against the will of its people and government.

We have collected a number of public statements made by Patriarch Kirill before and during the Russian “special operation” in Ukraine, by which he abetted Ukraine’s invasion and the ensuing war crimes and crimes against humanity.

On 23 February 2022, one day before the invasion of Ukraine, Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia **congratulated** Russian President Vladimir Putin on Defender of the Fatherland Day, according to the message published on the website of the Russian Orthodox Church:

"I cordially congratulate you on Defender of the Fatherland Day... I wish you good health, peace of mind and abundant help from the Lord in your high and responsible service to the people of Russia."

"The Russian Orthodox Church has always sought a significant contribution to the patriotic education of compatriots, which sees in military service an active manifestation of evangelical love for neighbors, an example of loyalty to the high moral ideals of truth and good."¹¹

On 27 February 2022, after the invasion of Ukraine started, during a sermon¹² delivered at the Cathedral of Christ the Savior in Moscow, the Patriarch blessed the Russian soldiers fighting for the Russian World and Holy Russia in Ukraine:

"May the Lord preserve **the Russian land**... A land which **now includes Russia and Ukraine and Belarus** and other tribes and peoples."

The Patriarch castigated those who fight against the historical unity of Russia and Ukraine, targeting them as the "**evil forces**".

He prayed God that the enemies of Holy Russia be defeated:

"God forbid that the present political situation in fraternal Ukraine so close to us should be aimed at making **the evil forces that have always strived against the unity of Russia and the Russian Church**, gain the upper hand," he said.

By labelling the Ukrainian defenders as the "forces of evil", Patriarch Kirill gave his blessing and canonical justification for Putin's "special operation" in Ukraine and the ensuing massacres.

In Patriarch Kirill's argumentation, the reason why Ukrainians are to be considered forces of evil is that they allegedly support the decadent mores imported from the West.

On 6 March 2022, he gave a homily on Forgiveness Sunday¹³ where he addressed Russia's military operation in Ukraine in the following terms:

For eight years there have been attempts to destroy what exists in the Donbass. And in the Donbass there is rejection, a fundamental rejection of the so-called values that are offered today by those who claim world power. Today there is such a test for the loyalty of this government, a kind of pass to that "happy" world, the world of excess consumption, the world of visible "freedom". Do you know what this test is? **The test is very simple and at the same time terrible - this is a gay parade. The demands on many to hold a gay parade are a test of loyalty to that very powerful world**; and we know that if people or countries reject these demands, then they do not enter into that world, they become strangers to it.

He further explained that the Russian World and Holy Russia will never tolerate on their soil those who adhere or tolerate such a decadent civilization:

"We do not condemn anyone, we do not invite anyone to ascend the cross, we just say to ourselves: we will be faithful to the word of God, we will be faithful to His law, we will be faithful to the law of love and justice, and if we see a violation of this law, **we will never put up with those who destroy this law, including blurring the line between holiness and sin, and even more so with those who propagandize sin**," the Patriarch said.

He went on: "All of the above indicates that we have entered into a struggle that has not a physical, **but a metaphysical significance**."

The Patriarch therefore considers that the territory of Donbass and other Ukrainian areas "belonging" to "Holy Rus"¹⁴ should be purified from their enemies, i.e. the supporters of Western decadent values.

Going further in his homily of March 6, the Patriarch of Holy Russia called for a fight "for human salvation":

"Therefore, what is happening today in the sphere of international relations has not only political significance. We are talking about something different and much more important than politics. **We are talking about human salvation, about where humanity will end up, on which side of God the Savior**, who comes into the world as the Judge and Creator, on the right or on the left."

In particular, the people of Donbass have been fighting to protect their faith:

"Today, our brothers in the Donbass, Orthodox people, are undoubtedly suffering, and we cannot but be with them, first of all in prayer. It is necessary to pray that the Lord would help them **to preserve the Orthodox faith, not to succumb to temptations and temptations.**"

All in all, Patriarch Kirill has backed **Putin's purifying "operation"** in Ukraine by equating it to a spiritual purification of Ukraine, a religious cleansing operation and religious crusade.

The proximity between the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) and the Kremlin is however not only physical, as they are only a few hundred meters from each other, but it is also political, geopolitical and spiritual.

In a long article titled "The Law, the Rights and the Rules," and published in The Diplomat Magazine on July 4, 2021, Sergey Lavrov, Russian Minister of Foreign affairs, criticized the "aggressive LGBT propaganda" by the "enlightened Europe", the US interference in church affairs, "openly seeking to drive a wedge into the Orthodox world, whose values are viewed as a powerful spiritual obstacle for the liberal concept of boundless permissiveness".¹⁵

Quite often, Patriarch Kirill has presented President Putin as the sole defender of Christianity in the world and even as the savior of Christians in Syria after he had sent his troops to save Bashar al-Assad and his regime.¹⁶

II – BACKGROUND

The Russian World: Collusion between President Putin and the ROC

The rapprochement between the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) and the Russian State started in the early 1990s, on the ashes of Communism after seventy years of anticlerical policy. In 1989, at the time of Gorbachev *Perestroika*, Vladimir Mikhaïlovitch Goundiaïev, his civil name before becoming Patriarch Kirill, was appointed President of the Department of External Ecclesiastical Relations of Moscow Patriarchate.

He held this function for twenty years and was able to implement his project of restoring the former glory of the Church by extending its influence not only in Russian society and politics, but also on the international scene.

He then built a network of influence which attracted the attention of Vladimir Putin when he came in power in 2000. For Putin, the Patriarchate's sphere of influence appeared to be the only thing left of the former Russian Empire.

In his eyes, Kirill was the only powerful actor in the country to be able to address the Russian World (*Russki Mir*) which he would try to reconquer later through the use of weapons. A kind of deal was made. Vladimir Putin would support the restauration of the glory of the Church and the construction of innumerable church buildings while Kirill would give him his diplomatic relays and the support of the Russian people.

In the 2000 Russian National Security Concept, the Putin Administration explained:

“Assurance of the Russian Federation’s national security also includes protecting the cultural and spiritual-moral legacy and the historical traditions and standards of public life and preserving the cultural heritage of all Russia’s peoples. There must be a state policy to maintain the population’s spiritual and moral welfare, prohibit the use of airtime to promote violence or base instincts, and counter the adverse impact of foreign religious organizations and missionaries.”¹⁷

The Spiritual Security concept in its internal dimension meant the protection of the ROC, especially against religious minorities newly arrived in Russia and perceived as competitors to the ROC. In its external dimension, “spiritual security” required the building of a civilizational sphere of influence – of the Russian cultural (spiritual) space, the *Russkiy mir*.

In 2007, the Russki Mir Foundation was established by a Decree of Vladimir Putin to “reconnect the Russian community abroad with their homeland, forging new and stronger links through cultural and social programs, exchanges and assistance in relocation”. The foundation functions actively abroad, for example through “Russian Centers”, which are designed to spread the Russian language and culture “as important elements of world civilization”.¹⁸

In November 2007, Foreign Minister Lavrov presented certain aspects considering the cooperation between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and the Church at a press conference held after the tenth meeting of the Working Group on MFA-Russian Orthodox Church Interaction. According to Lavrov, “Orthodox values formed the basis of Russian culture and Russian statehood” and “the Church engages in tackling the same tasks as does diplomacy”.¹⁹

In 2009, the Russki Mir foundation and the ROC signed a cooperation agreement aiming to “strengthen the spiritual unity of the Russian World”. At the 2009 third assembly of the Russki Mir foundation, the Patriarch defined the core of *Holy Rus* (Holy Russia) as Russia, Ukraine and Belarus. Patriarch Kirill added that the ROC also regards Moldova as a part of the Russian World.²⁰

At a reception for Orthodox Easter in Moscow on 18 April 2017, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov reiterated that “Russian diplomacy invariably receives the support of the Russian Orthodox Church. We highly appreciate the ROC’s contribution to strengthening the country’s moral authority, to creating an unbiased image of our country, to unifying the Russian world, and promoting the Russian language and culture.”

According to the Ukrainian Crisis Media Center “These organizations [the Russian centers in Ukraine] are involved in the promotion of historical and territorial revisionism, Russian disinformation narratives and hatred towards the Ukrainian state, polarizing society and, according to the Security Service of Ukraine, often serving as a façade for the activities of the intelligence services.”²¹

Call for Spiritual Expansionism and Eradication of the “Forces of Evil”

In 2009, after the invasion of Georgia in 2008 and before the annexation of Crimea in 2014, Patriarch Kirill emphasized in one of his speeches how **spiritual connections are of greater value than national borders**.²²

Spiritual expansionism and hailing Russia as the Third Rome and the heir to “Byzantium’s fallen Orthodox greatness” have for ever been promoted by both the Kremlin and the ROC.²³

On the same lines, Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia declared three years ago, on 31 January 2019:

“Ukraine is not on the periphery of our Church. We call Kyiv the Mother of all Russian cities. **Kyiv is our Jerusalem. Russian Orthodoxy started there.** It is impossible for us to abandon this historical and spiritual relationship”.²⁴

With homilies widely promoted in Russia, Patriarch Kirill laid the spiritual foundation justifying the aggression of Ukraine and blessed all those who would carry out this holy mission, and the war crimes and the crimes against humanity it involved.

III – CONCLUSION

All the above indicates that Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia has inspired, incited, justified, aided and abetted the war crimes (Art. 8) and crimes against humanity (Art. 7) committed by the Russian armed forces in Ukraine.

In its decision Bemba et al. of 19 October 2016, the International Criminal Court found:

89. With regard to the notion of ‘abet’, the Oxford Dictionary defines it as to ‘encourage or assist (someone) to do something wrong, in particular to commit a crime’. In the Chamber’s understanding, the notion of ‘abet’ describes the moral or psychological

assistance of the accessory to the principal perpetrator, taking the form of encouragement of or even sympathy for the commission of the particular offence. The encouragement or support shown need not be explicit. Under certain circumstances, even the act of being present at the crime scene (or in its vicinity) as a ‘silent spectator’ can be construed as tacit approval or encouragement of the crime.²⁵

Human Rights Without Frontiers welcomes the opening of an investigation on possible crimes committed in Ukraine under the Rome Statute.

We welcome the investigation to identify the perpetrators, including possibly going up the command chain to President Vladimir Putin.

We kindly request to the Prosecutor that the above facts be included in the investigation in order to establish the possible liability of Patriarch Kirill for aiding and abetting the perpetrators.

**For more information and interview, please contact Patricia Duval, attorney:
duval.patricia@gmail.com**

¹ Resolution of 7 April 2022 about the increasing repression in Russia, including the case of Alexei Navalny: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2022-0125_EN.html

² Message published on the website of the Russian Orthodox Church:
<http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/5900861.html>

³ See <http://www.interfax-religion.com/?act=news&div=16449> and
<http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/5904390.html>

⁴ See <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/5906442.html>

⁵ See under Background below for the meaning of this concept, p.8.

⁶ <https://diplomatmagazine.eu/2021/07/04/the-law-the-rights-and-the-rules/>

⁷ “Russian Patriarch Says War on Terrorism Is ‘Holy War for All’”, pravoslavie.ru 19.10.2016.

⁸ “2000 Russian National Security Concept,” available at:

<http://www.russiaeurope.mid.ru/russiastrat2000.html>

⁹ Information Portal of the Russki Mir Foundation, 2017. <http://russkiymir.ru/rucenter/>.

¹⁰ Opening Remarks by Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov at Press Conference After Tenth Meeting of Working Group on MFA-Russian Orthodox Church Interaction, Moscow, 20.11.2007: http://www.mid.ru/en/vistupleniya_ministra/-/asset_publisher/MCZ7HQuMdqBY/content/id/356698

¹¹ The Presentation of Patriarch Kirill at the opening ceremony of the Third Assembly of the Russian World, Internet Journal of the Russian Orthodox Church 3.11.2009.

<http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/print/928446.html>.

¹² <https://uacrasis.org/en/russkiy-mir-as-the-kremlin-s-quasi-ideology>, Оригінал стаммі - на сайті Українського кризового медіа-центру: <https://uacrasis.org/en/russkiy-mir-as-the-kremlin-s-quasi-ideology>.

¹³ “Spirituality as a political instrument”, the Finnish Institute of International Affairs, p.10 https://www.fiiia.fi/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/wp98_russia.pdf.

¹⁴ “Putin and the monk”, *Financial Times*, 25 January 2013.

<https://www.ft.com/content/f2fcba3e-65be-11e2-a3db-00144feab49a>.

¹⁵ <https://fr.aleteia.org/2022/03/03/vladimir-poutine-a-la-reconquete-de-leglise-autocephale-ukrainienne/>

¹⁶ *Bemba et al.*, Trial Judgment, para 89.

5th anniversary of the ban of Jehovah's Witnesses: Statistics about the repression

JW World Headquarters (20.04.2022) - April 20, 2022 will mark five years since Russia's Supreme Court criminalized the activity of Jehovah's Witnesses, liquidated some 400 of their legal entities, and confiscated their houses of worship. Russian authorities have since jailed over 320 Witnesses, with over 80 still in prison. The systematic persecution has escalated over the past year as prison sentences exponentially increased in frequency and in term length. Several Witnesses have also been tortured or severely beaten either while being interrogated or in prison.

Jarrod Lopes, spokesman for Jehovah's Witnesses, states: "It's well-documented that Jehovah's Witnesses endured decades of Soviet persecution. Ignoring this history, Russian authorities have inhumanely beaten, tortured, and imprisoned peaceful Jehovah's Witnesses in a failed attempt to break their faith and eliminate them. Long after the Soviet regime fell, Jehovah's Witnesses have continued to thrive and they will likewise outlive the current Russian administration."

Below are the latest statistics as well as some quotes from international experts that you will find helpful if you chose to report on the anniversary of the ban.

2017 Russian Supreme Court Ruling

- The April 20, 2022, Supreme Court ruling, albeit grossly unjust, simply liquidated all of the Witnesses' legal entities, Local Religious Organizations (LROs), in Russia and Crimea, declaring them "extremist". During the 2017 Supreme Court hearing, the Russian government claimed that individual Witnesses would be free to practice their faith. However, the government's claim of allowing freedom to worship has been inconsistent with its actions.
 - Additional references ([link1](#); [link2](#))

Home Raids, Criminal Cases, and Imprisonment

- 1741 homes of Jehovah's Witnesses have been raided, almost one per day
 - 27 homes raided since February 24th Ukraine invasion
- 620 JWs involved in 289 criminal cases
 - This includes [16 JWs in Crimea](#), 4 of whom are in prison (some after conviction have been transferred to prisons inside of Russia). All have been charged under prevailing Russian law
 - Oldest involved in a criminal case is 87.5-year-old [Yelena Zayschuk](#), she is 1 of 6 in their 80's; there are 34 in their 70's
- 88 total in prison, [over 325 have spent some time behind bars](#)

- 24 convicted and sentenced to [prison](#)
- 64 in [pretrial detention](#) facilities awaiting conviction or have been convicted but awaiting results of first appeal
- Longest time spent behind bars:
 - [Dennis Christensen](#), since May 2017 (serving 6-year sentence)
- Longest, harshest prison sentence
 - Male: 8 years—[Aleksey Berchuk](#), [Rustam Diarov](#), [Yevgeniy Ivanov](#), and [Sergey Klikunov](#)
 - Female: 6 years—[Anna Safronova](#)
 - 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
 - The terms escalated in 2021. Previous years the maximum sentence was 6.5, but in 2021 it jumped to 8 years, as noted above
 - Number of prison sentences annually steadily increased: 2019-2, 2020—4, 2021—27
- Oldest
 - Female: [Valentina Baranovskaya](#), 70 (2-year sentence)
 - Male: [Vilen Avanesov](#), 69, (6-year sentence)
- Over 450 added to Russia's federal [Rosfinmonitoring](#) list of extremists and terrorists
 - Many are placed on the list even before being criminally charged or tried—see [Forum18](#)

Beatings and Torture

For example:

- **February 2019, Surgut**, seven men tortured—suffocated, stripped naked, doused with water, and given electric shocks to their genitals—[link](#) to confirmed report. [Video](#) interviews
- **February 2020, Chita**, one man beaten, choked, and given electric shocks to his stomach and leg—[link](#) to report
- **February 2020, Orenburg**, five men severely beaten in prison, with one man being hospitalized for broken rib and damaged kidney—[link](#) to report
- **October 2021, Irkutsk**, one man beaten while his wife screamed for them to stop, another was tortured—stripped naked, lifted and suspended off the ground by his arms behind his back, attempted to force a glass bottle in anus area—[link](#) to report. [Video](#) interviews

As if torturing a man and making him writhe in pain isn't savage enough, many Russian officers will also resort to inhumanely threatening to have his wife raped.

- **Why and how successful is it?**

- Most often, Russian law enforcement officers have beaten or tortured Jehovah's Witnesses to force them to divulge information about fellow believers and or bully them into giving up their faith. The overwhelming majority of men withstood the torture and never complied, even with the smallest demands for information. That's why in most of the criminal cases, the authorities have resorted to planting a mole to infiltrate the congregation and leak the names, contact information, and worship activities of local Witnesses.

What Experts Are Saying

Natalia Prilutskaya, Russia researcher at Amnesty International, call on Russia to: “to immediately and unconditionally release all Jehovah’s Witnesses arbitrarily deprived of freedom for their faith and to drop criminal charges against all peaceful believers. Those who have been subjected to criminal prosecution, torture and other ill-treatment, unlawful searchers of their properties, who have lost their jobs, must receive adequate compensation and have their rights restored.”

The world should have started paying more attention to prosecution of Jehovah’s Witnesses in Russia already five years ago. Arbitrary prosecution of peaceful believers on spurious charges of “extremism” was and is a litmus test of the lack of freedom in Russia and of the Russian government’s intentions to quash any dissent, anything that they see as a threat to their official narratives. While the world was watching repressions against dissenters being unleashed within Russia, its government was also quietly preparing to promote their world view with tanks and missiles on the territory of the neighboring country, Ukraine. Were there a stronger international reaction to persecutions inside Russia, including to persecution of Jehovah’s Witnesses, the world could have been in a much better place today now. To prevent further escalation, it is important to expose and rigorously respond to human rights violations being committed in Russia. Restoring justice for one of the persecuted communities - Jehovah’s Witnesses – is one of the steps on the long road to restoring human rights and freedom in Russia and ensuring that no more international crisis, like the aggression against Ukraine, could be conceived in the Kremlin.”

Sir Andrew Wood, former British Ambassador to Russia (1995-2000), states: “It follows that the punishment of peaceful believers on the grounds of their certification as extremists by the Russian Supreme Court in effect by demand of Russia’s current president is arbitrary and unjust. Their arrest, ill treatment, and confinement are a breach of elementary human rights together with the infringement of the freedom of all souls to seek their path to the truths of religion as best they may. The targeting of particularly vulnerable people of whatever gender or age adds to the injustice.”

“The people of Russia and those beyond them share an interest in the country's future rule under the conditions of natural law. That is essential to its future beneficial evolution. The peaceful pursuit of religion is an essential element of that aspiration, whether in times of war like the present or in less dangerous circumstances. It therefore deserves our support as we hope and work for a better future.”

Dr. Emily Baran, expert on Russia and Soviet history, states: “The history of Jehovah’s Witnesses, both in Russia and worldwide, makes clear that persecution will not have its intended purpose of eliminating this faith community. What persecution does is isolate Witnesses, subject them to cruel and senseless harassment, violence, and loss of freedom, and make their daily lives full of uncertainty. The Witnesses have

demonstrated adaptability before, including in the Soviet period, and will continue to find ways to practice their faith even in these difficult conditions. Russian Witnesses will adapt because they have to, because they feel their faith requires it of them, and because repeated persecution has given them the skills to do so effectively.

More comments by the experts above can be downloaded [here](#).

Russia Exporting Weaponization of Anti-Extremism Legislation

- Russia has been seeking ways to export its anti-extremism legislation, along with how to weaponize it
 - May 2020, Putin signed a “Decree of the President of the Russian Federation”—“On Adopting a Strategy to Counteract Extremism in the Russian Federation Until 2025”
 - Section 32 on pg. 16, clearly outlines the President’s goals, in the field of international cooperation:
 - Strengthening the position of the Russian Federation in international organizations whose activity is aimed at counteracting extremism;
 - Promoting in bilateral and multilateral formats Russian initiatives in counteracting extremist activities, including over the Internet;
 - Signing agreements with foreign states aimed at solving problems in the realm of counteracting extremism;
 - Exchanging best practices in counteracting extremism, including cooperating together to develop international legal documents;
 - Moscow-based rights advocate Sova Center published a [report in 2020](#) confirming that “Russian extremist legislation has been and remains the model anti-extremist legislation for Central Asian countries, despite the fact that, in recent years, it has been repeatedly criticized at the international level by UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet, the UN Human Rights Committee, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, the Venice Commission, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance of the Council of Europe, and other structures

Special Bimonthly FORB Digest (01–15.04.2022)

14.04.2022 - The Court did not satisfy the appeal of three of Jehovah's witnesses from Cheboksary. They are fined for their beliefs

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2022/04/140845.html>

On April 13, 2022, the Supreme Court of the Chuvash Republic approved fines against Vladimir Dutkin, Vladimir Chesnokov and Valeriy Yakovlev. Peaceful religious practice by Jehovah's Witnesses was equated by the court with extremist activity.

Earlier, the Kalininskiy District Court of Cheboksary sentenced believers to fines ranging from 400,000 to 500,000 rubles. The verdict has entered into force. The convicts consider it unfair and insist on their innocence.

[Continue reading...](#)

12.04.2022 - A Sochi Court convicts four Jehovah's witnesses, including a woman

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2022/04/120939.html>

It became known that on March 28, 2022 the judge of Khostinsky District Court of Sochi Konstantin Sidoruk found four of local Jehovah's Witnesses guilty of extremism. Two of them were sentenced to a penal colony, but they have already served their sentences in the pre-trial detention center. Another two were given suspended sentences by the court.

[Continue reading...](#)

12.04.2022 - RUSSIA: 71 known "missionary activity" prosecutions in 2021 – list

Forum 18 found 71 prosecutions in 2021 (4 of organisations and 67 of individuals) for violating Russia's July 2016 Administrative Code Article 5.26, Parts 4 and 5, which punish "illegal missionary activity". 44 of the prosecutions resulted in initial convictions, all being punished with fines (though 7 were overturned on appeal). In 2021 there was a conviction rate of 85 per cent. Of the 15 foreigners prosecuted, 4 were fined, of whom 3 were also ordered deported.

[Continue reading...](#)

12.04.2022 - RUSSIA: 37 known "missionary activity" prosecutions in second half of 2020 – list

Forum 18 found 37 prosecutions in the second half of 2020 (3 of organisations and 34 of individuals) for violating Russia's July 2016 Administrative Code Article 5.26, Parts 4 and 5, which punish "illegal missionary activity". 27 of the prosecutions resulted in initial convictions, all being punished with fines (though 3 were overturned on appeal). The second half of 2020 saw a conviction rate of 84 per cent. Neither of the two convicted and fined foreigners was ordered deported.

[Continue reading...](#)

11.04.2022 - RUSSIA: "Virtually anything can be deemed to be unlawful missionary work"

In the 18 months from July 2020 to December 2021, Forum 18 found 108 prosecutions on administrative charges of unlawful "missionary activity" to punish a wide range of activities, including worship meetings for fellow believers. Prosecutions continued in 2022, with a judge fining and ordering deported a Tajik citizen for leading Muslim prayers. The legislation on missionary activity is "formulated in such a way that virtually anything can be deemed to be unlawful missionary work", comments Olga Sibiryova of SOVA Centre.

[Continue reading...](#)

11.04.2022 - Krasnoyarsk Regional Court confirmed Anton Ostapenko's sentence: a six-year suspended sentence for believing in Jehovah God

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2022/04/111426.html>

On April 7, 2022, the Krasnoyarsk Regional Court did not satisfy the appeal against the sentence of Jehovah's Witness Anton Ostapenko and upheld [the sentence of the court of first instance](#)—6 years and 3 months of suspended imprisonment with a probationary period of 4 years and 1.5 years of additional restrictions.

[Continue reading...](#)

11.04.2022 - An appeal in Primorye overturned the acquittal of Dmitriy Barmakin. The case is sent for retrial.

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2022/04/111417.html>

On April 8, 2022, a panel of judges of the Primorye Territory Court chaired by Tatyana Myshkina granted the prosecutor's appeal against the acquittal Dmitriy Barmakin, one of Jehovah's Witnesses. The verdict was canceled, the case was sent for a new trial to the court of first instance.

[Continue reading...](#)

09.04.2022 - Russian Court nullifies acquittal of Jehovah's Witness

A court in Russia has nullified the acquittal of a Jehovah's Witness and sent his case for retrial amid an ongoing crackdown on the followers of the religious group.

The Primorye regional court in Russia's Far East ruled on April 8 that Dmitry Barmakin's acquittal in November was wrong, claiming that materials collected by investigators suggest he was involved in the "organization of an extremist group's activities."

[Continue reading...](#)

07.04.2022 - Believers were again searched in Kazan. Two men were interrogated.

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2022/04/071627.html>

Early in the morning of April 6, 2022, searches were again carried out in Kazan at the homes of Jehovah's Witnesses at at least two addresses. 28-year-old Aleksey Yermakov and 32-year-old Ivan Minin were taken for interrogation to the Center for Combating Extremism (CPE). Aleksey Gerasimov was [interrogated](#) there two weeks earlier.

[Continue reading...](#)

07.04.2022 - An appeal overturned Seversk-based Aleksey Yershov's initial prison term for practicing one's faith and replaced it with a three-year suspended sentence

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2022/04/071620.html>

On April 7, 2022, a panel of judges of the Tomsk Regional Court chaired by Andrey Kaplyuk commuted the sentence of Aleksey Yershov from Seversk. Instead of 3 years in prison, the 69-year-old Jehovah's Witness was given 3 years of suspended sentence. The verdict has entered into force.

[Continue reading...](#)

07.04.2022 - Homes of Jehovah's witnesses in Sosnovoborsk, Krasnoyarsk Territory, were searched; one of the believers is behind bars

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2022/04/071053.html>

On March 29, 2022, in the city of Sosnovoborsk, 40 km from Krasnoyarsk, searches and interrogations were carried out in 5 families of Jehovah's Witnesses. A criminal case was opened for faith against 55-year-old Yuri Yakovlev.

Yakovlev is accused of a crime under Part 1 of Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation "on the fact of organizing the activities of a religious association ... in connection with the implementation of extremist activities."

[Continue reading...](#)

05.04.2022 - Matryona Spiriadi, 68, and Aleksandr Vergunov, 24, based in Abakan, were each handed a two-and-a-half-year suspended sentence for reading the Bible

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2022/04/051433.html>

On April 4, 2022, the judge of the Abakan City Court, Yuriy Lotsky, sentenced Matrena Spiriadi and Aleksandr Vergunov to 2.5 years of suspended sentence. By its decision, the court equated the discussion of the Bible among friends with participation in the activities of an extremist organization.

[Continue reading...](#)

03.04.2022 - Moscow patriarch repeats propaganda regarding war

Link to full text in Russian: <https://irp.news/patriarch-rossija-i-ee-narod-miroljubivye-i-mnogostradalnye/>

Russians do not have a desire for war or for doing something that could cause harm to others. Russia and its people are peace-loving and longsuffering, Patriarch Kirill said at the main church of the armed forces of the Russian Federation, and he urged the army and people to realize the "historic importance of the moment."

Patriarch of Moscow and all-Rus Kirill urged Russian service personnel to be faithful to their oath to the end and "to realize the historic importance" of current events, and urged the whole people to understand that a special time has arrived upon which its fate may depend. The patriarch spoke about this on Sunday after the liturgy in the main church of the Armed Forces of the R.F.

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

Hundreds of priests of the Moscow Patriarchate in Ukraine condemn the role of Russian Patriarch Kirill in the war

HRWF (15.04.2022) - As of Thursday evening 14 April, three days after the launch of [the petition](#) condemning the role of Patriarch Kirill in the war, over 400 priests of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church/ Moscow Patriarchate (UOC-MP) had already signed it. The list of signatories is growing fast and is updated online every day. See this list [HERE](#) at the end of the petition in Russian.

The interview of Fr Andrei Pinchuk, Archpriest of the Dnipropetrovsk Diocese of the UOC-MP (some 240 miles southeast of Kyiv), who launched this initiative is also worth watching [HERE](#).

Text of the “Open request to the primates of local Orthodox churches”

“In these tragic days, when the brutal war of the Russian Federation against Ukraine continues, we, the priests of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, consider it our pastoral duty to appeal to the fullness of world Orthodoxy.

On February 24, 2022, Russian troops invaded the territory of the sovereign Ukrainian state without declaring war. The military aggression has been going on for more than a month. Russian troops are systematically destroying military infrastructure and residential areas, civilian enterprises, schools, hospitals, theaters, and so on. The Ukrainian economy is suffering heavy losses. But we are most saddened that thousands of civilians have already died during the war. The actions of the Russian army around Kharkiv, Chernihiv, Akhtyrka, Hostomel, Vorzel and especially Mariupol and Bucha have obvious signs of the genocide against the Ukrainian people and cause indignation around the world.

Already on the first day of the war, the Primate of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, His Beatitude Metropolitan Onufriy, condemned the aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine and addressed the president of Russia. V. Putin's call to end the war. In addition, His Beatitude Metropolitan Onufriy appealed to Patriarch Kirill of Moscow to raise his voice against the war. After that, both His Beatitude Onufriy personally and the Holy Synod of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church again appealed to Patriarch Kirill to speak out against the war and help end military aggression. However, Patriarch Kirill ignored these appeals.

Moreover, since the beginning of the war, Patriarch Kirill has repeatedly made public statements that contained actual support for the aggressive actions of the Russian Federation against Ukraine. On March 13, 2022, during the Liturgy at the Cathedral of Christ the Savior, Patriarch Kirill presented the commander-in-chief of the National Guard of the Russian Federation, V. Zolotov, the Icon of the Mother of God and gave his blessing to the employees of this state military organization. In a thank-you note to V. Zolotov bluntly said that the National Guard of the Russian Federation troops are taking an active part in the war that Russia has unleashed against Ukraine. At the same time, he called the Armed Forces of Ukraine "Nazis". After listening to Zolotov's words, the Patriarch did not express any objections. Patriarch Kirill's blessing of the Russian National Guard troops was an unequivocal endorsement of the war that the Russian Federation has unleashed against Ukraine.

Although Patriarch Kirill for many years claimed that he considers the Orthodox Christians of Ukraine his flock, for which he is responsible, in his public statements (including during visits to Ukraine) today, he directly blesses the physical destruction of this flock by Russian troops.

The actions of Patriarch Kirill caused mass indignation among the clergy and faithful of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. At least fifteen dioceses of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church have officially announced that they are stopping commemorating Patriarch Kirill during divine services. We know that in many other dioceses, the ruling bishops gave oral permission to the clergy not to remember the name of Patriarch Kirill. Thus, bishops, priests and ordinary parishioners of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church expressed their unequivocal distrust of Patriarch Kirill.

We fully support the refusal of the bishops and clergy of our church to commemorate Patriarch Kirill during the divine service. But today, this is not enough.

We clearly state that we can't continue to remain in any form of canonical subordination to the Moscow Patriarch. This is a command of our Christian conscience.

"We are witnessing the brutal actions of the Russian army against the Ukrainian people, which are approved by Patriarch Kirill. As pastors of the Church, and simply as Christians, we have always been, are and will always stay with our people, those who suffer and need help. We fully support the Ukrainian state authorities and the Armed Forces of Ukraine in their fight against the aggressor.

Our position fully corresponds to the Gospel and Church tradition. Protecting the motherland from the enemy is one of the main Christian virtues. We would especially like to emphasize that our position also corresponds to the internal legislation of the Russian Orthodox Church. Back in 2000, the foundations of the social concept of the Russian Orthodox Church were adopted. This document approves Christian patriotism, which is manifested, among other things, "in

defense of the fatherland from the enemy" (II, 3). Also, the foundations of the social concept clearly state that "the Church ... does not prohibit its children from participating in military operations, if it is a question of protecting their neighbors and restoring violated justice" (VIII, 2). This document also notes that "during the war, it is necessary to ensure the protection of the civilian population from direct military actions" (VIII, 3).

As citizens of Ukraine, today we act within the framework of these principles. We call for the protection of our homeland from the enemy who came to us with weapons; we support the Ukrainian army, which has come to the defense of our people and is striving to restore the violated Justice; we call for an end to the brutal destruction of the Ukrainian civilian population by the Russian military.

At the same time, Patriarch Kirill (as well as numerous bishops and priests in Russia) directly violate the norms of the basic social concept. In particular, this document clearly states that the Church cannot provide assistance to the state and cooperate with it if the state is waging an aggressive external War (III, 8). Today, the actions of the Russian Federation against Ukraine are nothing more than aggressive foreign war. This fact is recognized by the entire international community. In particular, on March 2, 2022, 141 countries supported the UN General Assembly resolution condemning Russian aggression against Ukraine. But both Patriarch Kirill himself and numerous clergy in Russia continue to support the aggressive foreign policy of the Russian Federation. Consequently, the position of the Moscow Patriarchate regarding the war against Ukraine does not meet either the norms of Christian morality or even its own regulatory documents.

Reflecting on the origins of the position of the Russian Orthodox Church regarding the war in Ukraine, we must admit that one of the ideological foundations of this war was the doctrine of the "Russian World", which was promoted personally by Patriarch Kirill for many years. This doctrine has been actively formed by Russian political scientists and sociologists since the 1990s. Its goal is to preserve the influence of the Russian Federation on the territory of the former Soviet Union after its inglorious collapse. Ideologists of the "Russian world", in particular within the Moscow Patriarchate, have never hidden the fact that this doctrine should contribute to Russian irredentism, that is, the gradual establishment of Russia's political control over territories that were previously part of the Soviet Union or even the Russian Empire.

Patriarch Kirill is one of the main ideologists of the "Russian World" doctrine. According to Patriarch Kirill, the "Russian World" is a single civilizational space covering territories where Russian culture has historically had a significant impact. He has repeatedly stated that he considers modern Russians, Ukrainians and Belarusians "one people", the people of the "Russian World". In particular, in 2014, [in one of his speeches on television](#), Patriarch Kirill said: "The Russian World is a special civilization, which embraces people who today call themselves by different names – both Russians, Ukrainians, and Belarusians." That is, according to the Patriarch, Russians, Ukrainians and Belarusians simply call themselves by different names, but at the same time remain a single people.

In 2021, in an interview on his 75th birthday, [Patriarch Kirill said](#): "For me, as the Patriarch of all Russia, there is no division into peoples and states, but there is a flock of the Russian Orthodox Church." Although Patriarch Kirill has always stressed that he does not question the existing state borders, [he still stated](#) that these borders "create unnecessary obstacles between the peoples of the Russian World."

On March 20, 2022, during the war that Russia launched against Ukraine, Patriarch Kirill, in his sermon at the Cathedral of Christ the Savior in Moscow, said that Russians and Ukrainians are "really one people." He stressed that he considers this to be God's truth, which is not changed because "we live in different countries today." Therefore the [Patriarch said](#) that he will continue to pray "for our united people, who today live in different countries."

All these statements are quite consonant with Russian state propaganda, which rejects the very fact of the existence of the Ukrainian nation and Ukrainian culture, and therefore does not actually recognize the right of Ukrainians to their own statehood. Thus, the "Russian World" doctrine, which Patriarch Kirill has been promoting for many years, today contributes to justifying Russia's military aggression against Ukraine.

However, we, Orthodox priests, want to draw special attention to those aspects of the doctrine of the "Russian World" that directly relate to the doctrine of the Church. In particular, Patriarch Kirill persistently identifies the "Russian World" with the so-called "canonical territory" of the Russian Orthodox Church. In particular, in 2009, in its [speech at the Assembly of the "Russkiy Mir" Foundation](#), Patriarch Kirill said that "the Russian Orthodox church fulfills its pastoral mission among peoples who accept the Russian spiritual and cultural tradition as the basis of their national identity, or at least as its essential part. That's why in this sense we also consider Moldova a part of this Russian World." In his official speeches, Patriarch Kirill repeatedly claimed that according to the Charter of the Eastern patriarchs on the creation of the Moscow Patriarchate (1593), all the territories that were located north of Byzantium were transferred to the jurisdiction of this Patriarchate. For example, on September 24, 2014, while speaking in Moscow at the VI International Festival "Faith and Word", Patriarch Kirill said that in 1593 The "Christian Oikumene to the north of the Byzantine Empire" was transferred to the Moscow Patriarchate. This is everything located to the North of Byzantium." According to this logic, the Eastern Patriarchs seem to have recognized the extension of the jurisdiction of the Moscow Patriarch to Ukraine, Belarus, the Baltic states, and Moldova. It is these territories that Patriarch Kirill today declares a zone of his "canonical responsibility" and identifies with the "Russian World". From the point of view of Patriarch Kirill, all churches in these territories do not have the right to church independence (autocephaly). According to his logic, Churches in Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, and the Baltic states are literally doomed to remain part of the Moscow Patriarchate forever.

These statements of Patriarch Kirill come into obvious contradiction with historical facts. But, surprisingly, Patriarch Kirill passes off this false interpretation of history as the position of the entire universal Orthodoxy. Moreover, in the words and actions of Patriarch Kirill, we see obvious distortions of the Orthodox teaching about the Church. Patriarch Kirill's statements regarding the "Russian World" are reminiscent of ethnophyletism condemned by Ecumenical Orthodoxy, where the role of an ethnic group is played by "Russian civilization". Patriarch Kirill's statements that the jurisdiction of the Moscow Patriarchate extends to all people who accept "Russian spiritual and cultural traditions as the basis of their national identity" come into obvious contradiction with Orthodox canon law. Such an understanding of the Church order means rejecting the territorial principle of spreading ecclesiastical jurisdiction and replacing it with a national (or cultural-national) principle.

In March 2022, a group of Orthodox theologians issued the [Declaration on the Doctrine of the "Russian World"](#), which has already been supported by over 300 intellectuals worldwide. We

believe that this declaration was an important step toward understanding the distortions of Orthodox teaching about the church that occurred in the Moscow Patriarchate.

All these considerations force us to turn to the Primates of the Local Orthodox Churches. We declare our loyalty to Universal orthodoxy, our desire for the fullness of our communion with it, and condemn any attempts to limit our communion with it. We also believe that it is the fullness of ecumenical Orthodoxy that should pay full attention and responsibility to the statements and actions of Patriarch Kirill today. "The tragedy unfolding in Ukraine today is also the result of the policy that Patriarch Kirill pursues during his time at the head of the Russian Orthodox Church. Obviously, this has already become a challenge for the entire universal Orthodoxy.

Therefore we call on the Primates of the Local Orthodox Churches:

1. Clearly and unambiguously condemn the military aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine.
2. Call on the president of the Russian Federation, V. V. Putin will immediately end the war and liberate all the occupied territories of sovereign Ukraine.
3. Review the public statements of Patriarch Kirill of Moscow regarding the war against Ukraine and evaluate them in the light of the Holy Scriptures and the sacred tradition of the Church.
4. Consider at the Pan-Orthodox level the doctrine of the "Russian World", which for many years has been promoted by Patriarch Kirill and which has become one of the ideological justifications for the war of the Russian Federation against Ukraine, and give this doctrine an assessment from the point of view of orthodox teaching and in case of the condemnation of this doctrine, bring Patriarch Kirill to justice and deprive him of the right to hold the patriarchal throne.

This appeal is open for signing by the clergy of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

Those clergymen of the UOC who are willing to sign our appeal, please [send me private messages](#) (067-6-333-112 in any Messenger) with the following text: "I sign the appeal. (rank, last name and first name, Name of the diocese) After the collection of signatures is completed, the appeal will be sent to all primates of local Orthodox Churches. It will also be sent to the attention of Moscow Patriarch Kirill."

More reading

Orthodox priests call for patriarchs to depose Kirill, by [Patrick Hudson](#), The Tablet (12.04.2022)

https://www.thetablet.co.uk/news/15278/orthodox-priests-call-for-patriarchs-to-depose-kirill?fbclid=IwAR3iOJ_HFDMM0J_S9T1xcsdDFY_Ie11-ryqT_Wreq1So5G3AGrJZBaRnEO0

The European Parliament has condemned the role of Russian Patriarch Kirill in the war

The European Times (14.04.2022) – In a [resolution](#) on 7 April 2022 about “the increasing repression in Russia, including the case of Alexei Navalny,” the European Parliament condemned the role of Moscow Patriarch Kirill in Russia’s war against Ukraine. Item 6 of the resolution states:

“Condemns the role of Moscow Patriarch Kirill, head of the Russian Orthodox Church, in providing theological cover for Russia’s aggression against Ukraine; praises the courage of the 300 priests of the Russian Orthodox Church who signed a letter condemning the aggression and expressed their grief over the ordeal of the Ukrainian people, calling for an end to the war. “

In parallel, clergymen of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate decided to appeal to the Cathedral of the Primates of the Ancient Eastern Churches with a lawsuit against the Russian Patriarch Kirill for “committing moral crimes.” Priests of the Moscow Patriarchate in Ukraine demand an international tribunal for the head of the Russian Orthodox Church, Patriarch Kirill.

The statement of the priests was published by Fr Andrei Pinchuk on his Facebook page.
Excerpt:

“Today, when Patriarch Kirill of Moscow frankly supports Russia’s war of conquest against Ukraine, we, the priests of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, have decided to appeal to the Council of Primates of the Ancient Eastern Churches with a lawsuit against Patriarch Kirill.

Our main accusations:

- 1. Cyril preaches the doctrine of the ‘Russian world’, which does not correspond to Orthodox teaching and should be condemned as heresy;*
- 2. Kirill committed moral crimes by blessing the war against Ukraine and fully supporting the aggressive actions of Russian troops on the territory of Ukraine.*

We hope that the Council of Primates of the Ancient Eastern Churches will consider our appeal and make its fair decision,” the appeal says.

Freedom of religion or belief – Special bimonthly FORB (16.03-01.04-2022)

01.04.2022 – Over 60 places of worship in Ukraine, as well as sites of cultural heritage, have been attacked by the Russian invaders, with some totally destroyed

Five weeks into its war against Ukraine, Russia has bombed or shelled over sixty places of worship in at least eight oblasts (Kyiv; Donetsk; Luhansk; Kharkiv; Sumy; Zaporizhya and Zhytomyr). It has also destroyed or damaged many places of huge cultural significance.

[Continue reading...](#)

31.03.2022 – In Omsk, the case of followers of “Tablighi Jamaat” was considered, the regional court toughened the sentence

In January, a court in Omsk fined three Tablighi Jamaat followers under Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code. The regional court changed the punishment and sentenced one of them to a real term, and two to a suspended sentence.

In March 2022, it became known that three followers of the Tablighi Jamaat Islamic movement, which is recognized as an extremist organization in Russia, were sentenced in the Omsk region.

The verdict was passed on January 13, 2022 by the Kirovsky District Court of Omsk.

[Continue reading...](#)

28.03.2022 – A new criminal case against Jehovah’s Witnesses in Adygea. Nikolay Saparov, father of a minor child, was arrested

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2022/03/281129.html>

On March 22, 2022, 40-year-old resident of Maikop Nikolay Saparov was detained at the airport in Mineralnye Vody. Two days later the Maykop City Court of the Republic of Adygeya chose him as a measure of restraint in the form of detention for a period of two months.

After Saparov was detained, his wife and underage daughter travelled home alone. The same night, Saparov’s home was searched and he was taken there accompanied by investigator Murat Shnakhov.

[Continue reading...](#)

25.03.2022 – A series of searches of believers took place in the town of Balakovo. Five men were detained

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2022/03/251036.html>

It is known about at least five searches, which took place in Balakovo in the evening of March 23, 2022. Detained were Aleksey Bogatov, 61, Vladimir Mavrin, 59, Sergey Tyurin, 27, Yevgeniy Fomashin, 44, and Oleg Yandutov, 52. Nothing is known about the alleged crime or the measure of restraint.

[Continue reading...](#)

22.03.2022 – Three residents of Dagestan became suspects of participation in “Nurcular”

On March 22, 2022, the investigative department of the Russian Investigative Committee for Dagestan announced the initiation of a case under Part 2 of Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code (participation in the activities of an extremist organization) in relation to three residents of the republic.

According to investigators, from 2000 to 2017, the suspects participated in the activities of the Nurcular international religious association, which was recognized as extremist in 2008. They took part in meetings ” to study the ideological sources of the indicated extremist organization ,” the Investigative Committee claims.

[Continue reading...](#)

10.03.2022 – Orthodox priest reportedly arrested in Russia for sermon decrying invasion of Ukraine

A Russian Orthodox priest was reportedly arrested this week after he preached a sermon denouncing the Russian invasion of Ukraine, an unusual example of the Russian government cracking down on a cleric from a faith tradition that has long operated in lockstep with President Vladimir Putin.

[Continue reading...](#)

23.03.2022 – Russia sentences two Crimean Tatars to 17 and 13 years for talking about their faith

A Russian ‘court’ which has been imprisoning Ukrainian political prisoners since 2014 [has sentenced](#) two Crimean Tatars, both of whom were active in the Crimean Solidarity human rights movement, to 30 years’ imprisonment for conversations back in 2016 about their religious beliefs. Although it was another person, almost certainly an FSB agent, who initiated all the religious subjects on which the charges were based, and one of the men can be heard trying to politely end the conversation, the prosecution claimed that this was a ‘conspiratory’ meeting.

[Continue reading...](#)

23.03.2022 – Russian Lutherans adopt survival positions

Link to full text in Russian: <https://irp.news/glava-elcr-braujer-rasskazal-smi-rf-o-svoem-otezde-iz-strany/>

“Unfortunately the press interprets a great deal in its own way”.

The head of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of the European Part of Russia (ELCER), Archbishop Dietrich Brauer, in conversation with RIA Novosti, described how he left Russia on the invitation of the Evangelical Church in Germany (ECG) for prayer for peace and discussion with believers, lamenting that “the press interprets a great deal in its own way.”

[Continue reading...](#)

22.03.2022 – At least two more searches were carried out in Kazan on families of Jehovah’s Witnesses. The believer is under a recognizance agreement

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2022/03/221533.html>

On the morning of March 18, 2022, searches were carried out in Kazan in two families of Jehovah’s Witnesses. A criminal case was opened against 41-year-old Aleksey Gerasimov for his faith, he was placed under a recognizance agreement.

At 6:00 a.m., law enforcement officers invaded the homes of civilians. Electronic devices were confiscated from a large family with four children. The head of the family was interrogated for about 4 hours and then released.

[Continue reading...](#)

21.03.2022 – An appeal in Chelyabinsk left unchanged Snezhinsk-Based Lyudmila Salikova’s, 70, sentence — A six-year suspended sentence for practicing her faith in Jehovah God

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2022/03/211426.html>

On March 17, 2022, the Chelyabinsk Regional Court, with the participation of state prosecutor Sergey Gorshkov, considered the appeal of Lyudmila Salikova and approved the [sentence](#)—6 years of suspende sentence for believing in Jehovah God.

The panel of judges, chaired by Alexandr Rozhnov, considered the verdict of the first instance justified, despite the fact that there is not a single fact of the defendant committing extremist actions in the case file.

[Continue reading...](#)

21.03.2022 – An appeal in Volgograd upholds the sentence of four Jehovah’s Witnesses

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2022/03/210919.html>

On March 18, 2022, the Volgograd Regional Court upheld the conviction of Valeriy Rogozin, Igor Egozaryan, Denis Peresunko and Sergey Melnik. They will get jailed for their faith in Jehovah God.

In September 2021, the court of first instance sentenced Rogozin to 6 years and 5 months in a penal colony, Peresunko to 6 years and 3 months, and Melnik and Egozaryan to 6 years in a penal colony. The verdict has entered into force, but believers can appeal it in cassation.

[Continue reading...](#)

17.03.2022 – Appellate courts tending to favor Jehovah’s Witnesses in central Russia

Link to full text in Russian: <https://cutt.ly/7D3gEUj>

In Sverdlovsk oblast, a high-profile criminal case against devotees of the organization of Jehovah's Witnesses (considered extremist and forbidden in Russia) Alexander Prianikov, Venera Dulovaya, and Darya Dulovaya ended in a verdict of acquittal. These persons were the first adherents of the movement in the region to come to the notice of law enforcement. The verdict may affect other cases that are also being considered by courts.

The case against the devotees of the Jehovah's Witnesses from Karpinsk was begun back in 2018 and was the first in Sverdlovsk oblast from the time when the organization was ruled by the Russian Supreme Court to be extremist. The reason for the prosecution was the preaching of the defendants.

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

17.03.2022 – One of Jehovah's Witnesses was detained in Moscow. His apartment in Kazan was searched

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2022/03/171629.html>

On March 15, 2022, spouses Sergey and Yelena Gromov, Jehovah's Witnesses from Kazan, were detained at Moscow's Vnukovo airport. The 52-year-old believer was taken into custody, his wife was able to get home. The next day, their apartment was searched.

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

Muslim followers of peaceful new religious movements prosecuted

Two-year prison term for a Tablighi Jamaat follower

SOVA CENTER/ HRWF (31.03.2022) - <https://bit.ly/3qX6mD0> - *In January, a court in Omsk fined three followers of Tablighi Jamaat under Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code. The regional court changed the punishment and sentenced one of them to a two-year prison term and two to a suspended sentence.*

In March 2022, Sova Center reported that three followers of the Islamic movement Tablighi Jamaat were sentenced in the Omsk region, which was recognized as an extremist organization in Russia.

The verdict was delivered on 13 January 2022 by the Kirovsky District Court of Omsk. **Sultan Dyusekenov** was convicted for organizing the activities of an extremist organization (Part 1 of Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code), and **Abdimomun Mamyтов and Murat Baltabayev** for participating in this organization (Part 2 of Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code). All of them were sentenced to a fine of 20 to 90 thousand rubles.

On 30 March, the Omsk Regional Court considered the prosecutor's appeal and toughened the sentence. **Dyusekenov was finally sentenced to two years in a general regime colony with deprivation of the right to engage in public organizations for three years and restriction of liberty for a year and a half.** Mamyтов and Baltabayev received a year and a half

probation sentence with additional penalties in the form of a three-year ban on participation in the work of public organizations and restriction of freedom for eight months.

The accused were detained in the spring of 2021 as part of a group of 11 people. According to the investigation, they "were spreading the ideology of Tablighi Jamaat using specialized religious literature."

According to the investigation, Dyusekenov was the head of the "cell" of Tablighi Jamaat, which functioned from 24 July 2020 to 3 April 2021, in which he attracted Mamyтов and Baltabayev. The latter, the court stated, were entrusted with the responsibility of promoting the activities of Tablighi Jamaat among the local population.

The Tablighi Jamaat religious movement was [banned](#) in Russia in 2009, in the opinion of Sova Center, 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 is unjustified.

See HRWF report about Tablighi Jamaat [here](#)

Three residents of Dagestan suspects of participating in the non-existing religious organization "Nurjular"

SOVA CENTER/ HRWF (22.03.2022) - A criminal case has been initiated in Dagestan under Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code.

On 22 March 2022, the Investigative Department of the Investigative Committee of Russia for Dagestan announced the opening of proceedings under Part 2 of Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code (participation in the activities of an extremist organization) against three residents of the republic.

According to the investigation, from 2000 to 2017, the suspects participated in the activities of the international religious association Nurjular, recognized as extremist in 2008. They took part in meetings "*to study the ideological sources of this extremist organization*, according to the Investigative Committee.

The criminal case was initiated based on the materials of the regional FSB of the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

The opening of a similar case against a resident of Dagestan Izberbash became known in January. Earlier, in 2021, a court in Izberbash terminated a number of cases of alleged Nurjular participants investigated under Part 2 of Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code.

Sova Center considers the Nurjular [ban](#) illegal. His recognition as an extremist organization in 2008 was the result of unreasonable bans on the books of the Turkish Islamic theologian of the moderate direction Said Nursi - for promoting the superiority of Islam over other religions.

In 2018, the European Court of Human Rights [ruled](#) that by banning these books, Russian courts violated Art. 10 of the European Convention guaranteeing freedom of expression. The opinion of the Sova Center is that the Nurjular organization does not exist and Russian Muslims studying Nursi's heritage are not part of any such organization. Nevertheless, the Nurjular association is banned in Russia as an extremist organization, as a result of which Muslims reading and discussing Nursi's books are prosecuted.



See HRWF report on Nurjular/ Said Nursi followers [here](#)

How the Russian Orthodox Church enabled Putin's war against Ukraine

Viktor Yelenskyi

Russia's war against Ukraine was greatly enabled by the Russian Orthodox Church, and its hierarchs are currently cheering on Putin's invasion. Moreover, the need to "protect" the Moscow Patriarchate in Ukraine was one of the several false pretexts for the devastating attack on Ukraine. How did this happen and what will be the future of the Russian church, including its structures in Ukraine? Religious expert Viktor Yelenskyi explains.

Euromaidan.Press (22.03.2022) - <https://bit.ly/3MTR3nR> - Religion and primary Eastern Orthodoxy has been one of the most sensitive issues in Russian-Ukrainian relations, even amid a tangled knot of acute political, economic, and humanitarian contradictions.

Church independence in Orthodoxy mostly follows political independence

Throughout the three centuries that have passed since 1686 when the Moscow patriarchate seized the established in 10th-century Metropolitanate of Kyiv from its weakened Constantinople Mother Church, the Ukrainians have [repeatedly attempted to break away](#) from Moscow's ecclesiological dependence.

After Ukraine gained independence in 1991, the subjection of Ukrainian Orthodoxy to the Moscow Patriarchate became unacceptable to large segments of the Ukrainian elite. Although Orthodox theologians have argued convincingly that the Orthodox Church is a single Church and not a confederation or even a federation of Local Churches, the **principle of locality** remains one of the few undeniable principles within Orthodox ecclesiology.

Bluntly, one could say that with the exemption of ancient Churches of Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem, the establishment of Local self-governed (autocephalous) Churches **coincided with the establishment of statehood**, while the fall of statehood, in the end, led to the loss of autocephalous status (as were the cases in Serbian and Georgian histories).

The autocephaly granted to the Orthodox Churches of Greece, Serbia, Romania, Bulgaria, Poland, Albania, Georgia, the Czech Lands and Slovakia, and formerly to the Kingdom of Moscow, were justified essentially politically: by the **formation of a sovereign state by respective nations**.

Thus the question of acquiring autocephaly (or restoring autonomy, as in the case of the Estonian Apostolic Orthodox Church) became the focus of church policy in Kyiv, Skopje, Tallinn, and Chisinau as early as the beginning of the 1990s; after 2006, Montenegrin Podgorica joined them as well.

A desire to break with subordination to Moscow

The eagerness to break with ecclesiastical subordination to Moscow in Ukraine has repeatedly intensified as the Moscow Patriarchate has come to terms with its subordinate role as a junior partner of the Russian state and has supported an official turn toward chauvinism, militarism, and the destruction of civil rights and freedoms in Russia itself.

In addition, the role of Russian Orthodoxy as a tool to achieve the tactical and strategic goals of Russian foreign policy was becoming increasingly aggressive.

A special role in this was played by the **16th Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia, Kirill**, who was elected Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) in 2009. It was Patriarch Kirill who revitalized the concept of the “Russian world” constructed by Russian political technologists and turned it into a geopolitical doctrine.

According to the Patriarch’s construct, the united “[Russian world](#)” should “become a strong subject of global world politics, stronger than all political alliances.”

Kirill, to the dismay and confusion of theologians, **publicly proclaimed Russian control over Ukrainian Orthodoxy to seemingly be part of Orthodoxy’s teachings.**

At the same time, the Kremlin blatantly instrumentalized Moscow Patriarchate to legitimize their messianic doctrines and foreign policy claims, declared Orthodoxy “*an inseparable part of the effort to assert Russia’s original role on the world stage,*” and then a **key ideological construct in the confrontation with the West.**

President Putin himself said that Orthodoxy is closer to Islam than to Catholicism while Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said that Russia is returning to its traditional values, which are rooted in Orthodoxy, and as a consequence becomes less understandable to the West than it was during the Soviet times.

The Tomos: a historical moment for Ukrainian Church independence

With the beginning of Russian aggression against Ukraine in 2014, the Moscow Patriarchate justified militarist-chauvinist, anti-Western and anti-Ukrainian discourses of Kremlin propaganda.

ROC’s clerics were directly involved in the occupation of Ukrainian lands, and the priesthood of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate was becoming one of the most organized centers for promoting Russian narratives among those officially operating in Ukraine.

Patriarch Kirill himself headed the hybrid war’s religious battlefield.

In August 2014, he issued a **letter to the Primates of the Orthodox Churches**, in which he accused “Uniates and Schismatics” of waging a religious war against “canonical Orthodoxy.”

In May 2015, Patriarch Kirill announced that “godlessness is becoming the state ideology of Ukraine.”

The Russian invasion of Ukraine and almost unconditional support of Russian foreign policy by the Moscow Patriarchate forced the Ukrainian governmental and ecclesiastical circles to intensify their continuing efforts in gaining independence from the Russian Church.

In 2018, a window of opportunity finally opened for a solution to this problem that had been considered intractable. The first among equal in the east Orthodox World **Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew**, who, like his predecessors, had never recognized the legitimacy of the annexation of the Kyiv Metropolitanate by the Moscow Patriarchate in the 17th century, but had abstained from the decisive action on this track for a long time, finally decided to take a bold move.

Shocked by the Russian invasion and unheard of attempts by the Russian state and the Moscow Patriarchate to undermine his influence in the Orthodox world, emboldened by the unanimity of all branches of the Ukrainian government, Patriarch Bartholomew opened the procedure for **granting autocephaly to the Orthodox Church in Ukraine through the [Tomos](#)**.

The efforts of the Russian secret services, intelligence, cybercriminals they control, and diplomacy to prevent Ukrainian autocephaly were unprecedented.

Kirill approves of the war

Patriarch Bartholomew's bestowing of autocephaly to the Orthodox Church of Ukraine on 6 January 2019, which was enthusiastically received by Ukrainian society, was seen by the Kremlin as an extremely painful blow to the entire system of control over Ukraine and became a deep notch in the Russian dictator's hate-filled brain.

Putin returned to this issue more than once, and each time he spared no words to demonstrate his frenzied anger.

The need to “protect” the Moscow Patriarchate in Ukraine was one of the several equally disgusting in their falsehoods pretexts for the devastating attack on Ukraine.

Putin also could not avoid this theme in his utterly false Hitler-style address to the Russians on the eve of a large-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russian troops at the end of February 2022.

And it is the church buildings of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate, whose leaders before the “great war” could not find the courage to object to any of Putin’s insane claims, that suffered the greatest destruction in its very first days.

As of mid-March, at least two dozen UOC MP’s churches in Luhansk, Kyiv, Chernihiv, Sumy, Kherson, and other oblasts had suffered from Russian shelling.

At the same time, even against the backdrop of the terrible suffering that has befallen Ukrainians since the first days of the invasion, the position of the Moscow Patriarchate deeply shocked those of them who until that time had considered themselves faithful to this Church.

Even Patriarch Kirill’s most loyal supporters were stunned by his sermon during the Forgiveness Sunday liturgy.

To the horror and outrage of his Ukrainian flock, Kirill blamed liberal western values, particularly gay pride parades, for Russia’s bloody invasion of Ukraine.

A week later, the Patriarch blessed Putin’s war by presenting an icon of the Virgin Mary to the head of the Russian National Guard and expressing hope for a “quick” victory over Ukraine.

More than five hundred Orthodox theologians, church figures, and professors mostly from the Western Universities [signed](#) the “**Declaration on the ‘Russian World’ Teaching**,” which

states that the Russian war against Ukraine is rooted in a form of Orthodox religious fundamentalist, totalitarian false teaching called Russian world, repeatedly invoked and developed in speeches of President Putin and Patriarch Kirill over the last 20 years. Signatories rejected the “Russian world” heresy and the shameful actions of the Russian government in unleashing war against Ukraine as profoundly un-Orthodox, un-Christian, and against humanity.

Another 286 clergymen of the Russian Orthodox Church [issued a call](#) for reconciliation and cessation of the war.

But in Russia, the voices of infuriated clerics, demanding that “*the native Russian land must be cleansed of Banderite evil*” and even calling for weapons of mass destruction to be used against Ukraine, are heard much louder.

Unlike even in Nazi Germany, where the state’s enslavement of the German Evangelical Church brought to life a resisting Bekennende Kirche (Confessing Church), in Russian Orthodoxy, there are no evidences of bishops, clergy, and laity’s rebellion against the Church leadership’s flagrant ruptures with Evangelical truth.

Meanwhile, terrified and confused bishops and clergymen of the UOC-MP began, one by one, announcing they would cease commemorating Patriarch Kirill during the liturgy. This, of course, is the least they could do at a time when the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, and other, less numerous churches and religious communities called for “prayer and work” to defeat the enemy.

Apparently, the episcopate of the UOC-MP, which bears undoubtedly responsibility for poisoning its flock in Ukraine with the heresy of the Russian world, is afraid of the possible consequences for itself but thinks little of repentance. The “Princes of the Church” are much more concerned with preserving their corporation.

Therefore, they impose ecclesiastical penalties on priests who have transferred to the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, urging them not to take hasty steps and to decide the fate of their Church sometime in the future, “in a quiet time.” As a “Charter of Protection,” they use President Zelensky’s address, where he urged his compatriots to unite in the face of the deadly threat and put aside confessional, linguistic, and other disagreements. And certainly, the leadership of the UOC-MP does not consider for itself joining the autocephalous Orthodox Church of Ukraine, which would be the only proper move both from the moral and political standpoint and from the perspective of the Eastern Orthodox Canon Law.

However, it is obvious that church structures whose leadership in Moscow blesses the murder of Ukrainians precisely on the ground that they are willing to remain Ukrainians (because the notorious “denazification” declared as a purpose of invasion is nothing less than the de-Ukrainianization of Ukraine), have no place on Ukrainian soil.

We do not know right now how church figures who, for eight years, failed to notice the annexation of Crimea and Russian military aggression, boldly demanding peace from Kyiv and never from Moscow, will resolve this problem. The only thing that is obvious is that it will be impossible for them to avoid finding a solution, as they have thus been able to do.

It is also clear that Russian Orthodoxy is deeply infected with the cult of militarism, imperial exceptionalism, and the apology of violence, and this infection has spread beyond Russian borders. Most likely, getting rid of the corrode conscience infection would require dismantling

the monstrous patriarchal structures that have been firmly embedded into Putin's political-military machinery and a total reestablishment of the entire church organization.

And undoubtedly, the recovery will be a long and tortuous one.

Viktor Yelenskyi is Head Research Fellow at the Institute of Political and Ethnic Studies, National Academy of Science of Ukraine. He authored a great number of books, articles, and essays on religious freedom, religion and politics, and global religious trends. As a Member of the Verkhovna Rada of the 8th convocation he also drafted several Bills on Cultural Heritage, Sea Memorial, Church and State issues, and Creative Industries which successfully went through Parliamentarian voting.

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- [*Making Russia answer for destroying cultural heritage in Ukraine*](#)
- [*A short history of the Ukrainian Church: infographic*](#)

Impassioned appeal from Ukrainian Muslim leader in face of Russia's war to destroy Ukraine

Halya Coynash



Said Ismagilov in his appeal to Muslims of the World to support Ukraine

Kharkiv Human Protection Group (08.03.2022) - Sheikh Said Ismagilov, Mufti of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Ukraine 'UMMA', has called on Muslims in all countries to support Ukraine in its struggle against Russia's invasion, and has also made an extremely hard-hitting address to Muslims in Russia. Essentially all Ukraine's religious leaders have come out with clear statements in defence of Ukraine and in condemnation of Russia's aggression, even Metropolitan Onufriy, head of the Orthodox Church in Ukraine linked to the Moscow Patriarchate.

The address to Muslims in all countries was given in Ukrainian, and [can be followed in English translation here](#). The Mufti stresses that Russia is waging a war of aggression against Ukraine, aimed at killing Ukrainians, "*at destroying our people, our statehood and our freedom*" This is an unjust war, with the troops sent by Russian leader Vladimir Putin killing civilians and destroying people's homes. He calls on Muslims everywhere to be on Ukraine's side and to help in whatever way they can, and stresses that Ukraine is a country where Muslims are respected, "*where we have an unprecedented level of rights and freedoms*" and are "*an organic part of Ukraine*" He adds that this is in marked contrast to the Russian Federation.

Said Ismagilov's address to Muslims of the Russian Federation [can be heard in Russian here](#) and on [YouTube](#). Given Russia's [draconian measures](#) aimed at preventing the population

knowing the truth about its war against Ukraine, any help in ensuring that the address is heard would be welcome.

“I don’t know if you are aware, but at present an absolutely total war is being waged against our people, against the Ukrainian people and our state. Your media are lying to you. Your forces, your Russian forces have come here simply to kill us. They are shelling homes and civilians, and I call on you, Muslims of Russia, to not take part in any way in this war, to not support the Putin regime.”

He goes on to ask what Russian Muslims are waiting for. While all Russia’s forces are deployed in Ukraine, while Ukraine’s heroic army is fighting them off, they should begin their own liberation movement in the Russian Federation. He points out that they are being deprived of their native languages, of their rights and freedoms; of their identity as Muslims and as individual peoples.

“Russia is a prison of nations. Begin your liberation while all of the dogs are fighting us here. We will fight them off. We will win. You have the chance of self-determination; of freedom; [the chance] to reinstate your national, cultural and religious identity.”

Said Ismagilov was among many Ukrainian representatives of religious and national minorities who [spoke out publicly in defence of Ukraine](#), “the peaceful home of all us” after Putin’s declaration of war in the early hours of 24 February 2022.

Since Moscow has resorted to a particularly foul lie, claiming that its savage war against Ukraine is aimed at “the demilitarization and denazification” of Ukraine, the clear message given by Chief Rabbi of Ukraine, Yaakov Dov Bleich, was particularly welcome. On 25 February, [he stressed](#) that *“The Jewish community is an integral part of Ukraine and stands with the Ukrainian people, government and armed forces in defending Ukraine.”*

Ukraine is a country of many faiths, and it is likely that the list of spiritual leaders who have spoken out against the war and in support of Ukraine is very much longer. As with Said Ismagilov and Rabbi Bleich, there was nothing unexpected about the unequivocal support for Ukraine and its defenders taken by [Metropolitan Epiphanius, Head of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine](#), and by [Archbishop Sviatoslav Shevchuk, Head of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church](#).

It is the position of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church linked to the Moscow Patriarchate that had not, necessarily, been guaranteed. The current Moscow Patriarch, Kirill, has long been known for sharing the same strident ‘Russian world’ views as Vladimir Putin. Back in November 2009, Kirill [stated](#) that *“if we consider the Russian Federation with its present boundaries, then we have sinned against the historical truth and artificially cut off millions of people who are aware of their role in the fate of the Russian World and consider its creation their main deed.”*

Kirill has made no more than [a weak call](#) “to all parties to the conflict” to avoid civilian casualties, and has certainly not condemned Russia’s evident targeting of civilians. On 27 February, his purported call to peace [spoke](#) of the so-called “evil forces [in Ukraine] that have always strived against the unity of Rus’ and the Russian Church, gain the upper hand”.

All of this ‘call to peace’ was widely interpreted as in support of Putin’s war against Ukraine, and led to considerable protest from Orthodox priests, many of whom have publicly refused to

commemorate Kirill in their sermons. Others [have called](#) on the Head of the Orthodox Church under the Moscow Patriarchate, Onufriy, to break with the Moscow Patriarchate.

Russia's aggression against Ukraine began back in 2014, however it was noticeable then and later that the only faith in either occupied Crimea or Donbas that did not come under fire was the Orthodox Church linked to the Moscow Patriarchate. Although officially the latter did not take any position on the conflict in Donbas, it was certainly noticeable in the Verkhovna Rada back on 8 May 2014 that the only people who did not stand to commemorate 21 Ukrainian soldiers who had been killed in the war were Onufriy and two other representatives of the Church linked to the Moscow Patriarchate. The latter was also the only faith that did not take part in the Prayer Marathon for Peace in Donetsk.

A 2015 study entitled '[When God becomes the weapon](#)' identified systematic and widespread religious persecution, and also note that religion is one of the key motivating factors and justification cited for criminal activities by unlawful paramilitary groups within the Russian proxy 'Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics'.

As early as 24 February, before it became clear that Russia was bombing civilian targets and causing untold destruction and suffering, Onufriy came out with [a very different message](#). He called on believers to pray for Ukraine, its army and people and on Putin to end what he called a fratricidal war and "repetition of the sin of Cain".

It seems unlikely, given the brutality of Russia's attack on Ukraine, and the position taken by Kirill as head of the Moscow Patriarchate, that this will be enough to still the outrage and alienation very many believers are now experiencing.

Russia sentences two Crimean Tatars to 17 and 13 years for talking about their faith

By Halya Coynash

KHPG (23.03.2022) - <https://bit.ly/3qOQ2F4> - A Russian 'court' which has been imprisoning Ukrainian political prisoners since 2014 [has sentenced](#) two Crimean Tatars, both of whom were active in the Crimean Solidarity human rights movement, to 30 years' imprisonment for conversations back in 2016 about their religious beliefs. Although it was another person, almost certainly an FSB agent, who initiated all the religious subjects on which the charges were based, and one of the men can be heard trying to politely end the conversation, the prosecution claimed that this was a 'conspiratory' meeting. Neither man was accused of any actions or plans that would, in a democratic country, constitute a crime, yet the Russian court sentenced **Timur Yalkabov** to 17 years and **Lenur Seidametov** to 13 years.

Several dozen Crimean Tatars had come from occupied Crimea to show their solidarity with the two recognized political prisoners. Only the men's wives, and Timur's brother, were allowed into the courtroom, with traffic police deployed outside the court to harass and intimidate other Crimean Tatars by demanding to see their car documents and recording registration numbers. Police officers inside the court building also unwarrantedly demanded that no photos or videos from the court be loaded on the Internet. They ignored the request to explain on what legal

grounds they were making such a demand. Initial attempts to prevent journalists from being present were abandoned after the journalists stood their ground.

The sentences passed on 22 March 2022 were only slightly lower than those demanded by the Russian prosecutors **Mikhail Arefyev** and **Konstantin Firsov**.

Timur Yalkabov (b. 1980) was sentenced to 17 years' imprisonment, with the first four years in a prison, the very worst of Russian penal institutions, and the remainder in harsh-regime prison colonies. This, according to the sentence, is to be followed by 18 months' restriction of liberty.

Lenur Seidametov (b. 1985) was sentenced to 13 years, with the conditions identical to those against Yalkabov, followed by a year's restriction of liberty.

Both men are recognized as political prisoners by the renowned Memorial Human Rights Centre, and their release has been demanded by multiple European and international bodies. The charges themselves were both unwarranted and in violation of international law, and the alleged 'evidence' deeply flawed. None of this made any difference to presiding judge **Roman Saprunov**, together with **Rizvan Zubairov** and **Sergei Grishin** from the Southern District Military Court in Rostov who essentially provided the sentences demanded.

Seidametov and Yalkabov were arrested, together with four other Crimean Tatars, after armed searches at around 4 a.m. on 17 February 2021 during which the FSB did not pretend that they were looking for anything but 'prohibited' religious literature. Seidametov's wife has said that the FSB planted several such books, with this an increasingly common part of such 'searches' carried out with the men illegally prevented from having lawyers or independent witnesses present.

All of the men, including Seidametov and Yalkabov, were charged with 'involvement' in Hizb ut-Tahrir, a peaceful transnational Muslim organization that is legal in Ukraine. A flawed and secretive ruling by the Russian Supreme Court in 2003, declaring Hizb ut-Tahrir 'terrorist' has been used since 2014 to sentence people to up to 24 years for often unproven 'involvement' in a peaceful organization. Russia is particularly using it in occupied Crimea as a weapon against Crimean Tatar civic activists and journalists. Timur Yalkabov was charged with the more serious charge of 'organizing a so-called Hizb ut-Tahrir cell' (Article 205.5 § 1 of Russia's criminal code). Lenur Seidametov was accused of 'involvement in such a purported cell' (Article 205.5 § 2). Both men were also accused of 'planning to violently overthrow the state' (Article 278), with this also based solely on the 2003 Supreme Court ruling, not on any actual evidence.

As mentioned, the 'evidence' in this case was obtained illegally, via overt provocation from the FSB. There are certainly occasions where the security services in any country infiltrate organizations to prevent crimes or catch alleged criminals. They bear no resemblance to this case where the unidentified individual deliberately pushed a conversation on religious subjects in a direction that suited the prosecutor. The men themselves say that they met the individual at a mosque in 2016 after which he invited them for a cup of tea. The prosecution has since claimed that the latter conversation was 'a conspiratorial meeting' organized by Seidametov. In fact, the defence say, it is clear from the video that Seidametov was uncomfortable at this conversation and made every effort to leave the place where they were meeting. All of this is particularly shocking as the questions that this individual was asking (in the knowledge that the conversation was being videoed) are similar to those later put to the FSB-loyal 'linguist experts' for their assessment.

Lawyer Emil Kurbedinov has identified this unidentified individual, who appears as a 'secret witness for the prosecution', as an FSB agent called **Adnan Masri**, who has been deployed in a large number of such 'trials'. This individual gave testimony on 15 November, under the pseudonym 'Kurbanov'. He gave muddled and contradictory answers to questions, while

claiming to have suddenly ‘remembered’ some testimony that he had not presented earlier. The defence believe it was abundantly clear that the man was making things up, however this was ignored by the court, as was the lack of any legitimate grounds for allowing anonymous witnesses.

While Russia is using these prosecutions as a weapon against civic activists and journalists, the FSB themselves are known to gain promotion or at least bonuses for such cases. They can improve their statistics on ‘fighting terrorism’, while taking minimum effort since the charges are essentially copy-pasted from one case to another. The Russian prosecutors and judges then oblige by asking no inconvenient questions and demanding / imposing monstrous sentences for 5-year-old conversations about religion and solidarity with victims of repression.

PLEASE WRITE TO LENUR SEIDAMETOV AND TIMUR YALKABOV!

The men are likely to be held in the same prison until the appeal hearing, and letters tell them they are not forgotten, and show Moscow that the ‘trial’ now underway is being followed. Letters need to be in Russian, and on ‘safe’ subjects. If that is a problem, use the sample letter below (copying it by hand), perhaps adding a picture or photo. Do add a return address so that the men can answer.

Sample letter

Привет,

Желаю Вам здоровья, мужества и терпения, надеюсь на скорое освобождение. Простите, что мало пишу – мне трудно писать по-русски, но мы все о Вас помним.

[Hi. I wish you good health, courage and patience and hope that you will soon be released. I’m sorry that this letter is short – it’s hard for me to write in Russian., but you are not forgotten.]

Lenur Seidametov

344022, Россия, Ростов-на-Дону, ул. Максима Горького, 219 СИЗО-1.

Сейдаметову, Ленуре Люмановичу. г.р. 1985

[In English: 344022 Russian Federation, Rostov on the Don, 219 Maxim Gorky St, SIZO-1

Seidametov, Lenur Liumanovich, b. 1985

Timur Yalkabov

344022, Россия, Ростов-на-Дону, ул. Максима Горького, 219 СИЗО-1.

Ялкабову, Тимуру Муминовичу, г.р. 1980

[In English: 344022 Russian Federation, Rostov on the Don, 219 Maxim Gorky St, SIZO-1

Yalkabov, Timur Muminovich, b. 1980

Photo : From left Timur Yalkabov in T-shirt saying Faith is not terrorism, Lenur Seidametov in T-shirt saying Deportation continues Photo 22.03.2022 Photo Crimean Solidarity

Patriarch who's in lockstep with Putin

By Stephen Minas

EU Observer (07.03.2022) - <https://bit.ly/36PsFE5> - As Russia's brutal war of aggression in Ukraine has escalated, the head of the Russian Orthodox Church, Patriarch Kirill, has not said a word against Russian aggression.

For Kirill, obedient to the Russian censor's commands, there is no "war" in Ukraine.

Instead, in his [first public statement](#) following the Russian attack, Kirill could only "deeply empathise with everyone affected by this tragedy", as though Ukrainians are victims of a flood or earthquake.

Kirill's voice matters as the head of Russia's largest religious body – which claims Ukraine as its "canonical territory" – an which is [deeply-intertwined](#) with agenda of Vladimir Putin and that of his regime.

Kirill's doublespeak on "the events taking place" is not just reprehensible – it could even amount to an international crime. This is because of the importance of religious propaganda and incitement in this war.

Kirill and subordinates have for years peddled claims of a conspiracy of persecution against the Moscow Patriarchate's Church in Ukraine, following the [grant of autocephaly](#) (independence) to the Orthodox Church of Ukraine by the Istanbul-based Ecumenical Patriarchate.

Kirill has [claimed to receive](#) "a weekly report of those violations of the law, the suffering that people are experiencing ... violence, beatings, fighting for churches".

Kirill's de facto foreign minister, the department for external church relations chairman, Metropolitan Hilarion, has [alleged a campaign](#) "with the involvement of the authorities" of beatings and church seizures.

His Church's systematic propaganda campaign about Ukraine has been utilised in Putin's justification for war.

In his [21 February speech](#) on recognising the so-called Donetsk and Luhansk "people's republics", Putin parroted the Moscow Patriarchate's propaganda: "Kyiv continues to prepare the destruction of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate..."

Kirill has long echoed Putin's core claim underlying his war: denial of the existence of a distinct Ukrainian people.

Both [Putin](#) and [Kirill](#) claim that Russians and Ukrainians are "one people". Kirill again [invoked this theory](#) as Russia bombed Ukrainian apartment buildings and hospitals.

On 27 February, while offering perfunctory remarks about praying for peace, Kirill [reiterated his familiar themes](#) on Ukraine: "the present political situation in fraternal Ukraine" with "evil forces that have always strived against the unity of Russia" and the Russian Church (the so-called "Nazi junta"?).

"God forbid that a terrible line stained with the blood of our brothers should be drawn between Russia and Ukraine" he continued (with no hint that anyone in particular is responsible for this bloodshed), adding a warning against giving "the dark and hostile external forces an occasion to laugh at us".

He even specified that, in asking the Lord to "protect the Russian land against external enemies", he includes Ukraine and Belarus in Russia, alongside "other tribes and peoples".

Ukrainian defenders are battling Russian invaders but, according to Kirill, the conflict is actually between a mythically-united Rus people ("Rus" is the medieval entity from which both the modern Russians and Ukrainians descend), and "external enemies". These powerful unnamed actors, [according to Kirill](#), have been trying to force the residents of the Donbass to hold a "gay parade".

On 3 March, the same day that Putin issued a [clearly genocidal threat](#) to "destroy this 'Anti-Russia' created by the West", the Moscow Patriarchate circulated to its dioceses [the text of a special prayer](#), "approved" by Kirill, to be read in its churches.

This text reiterates the [Russian World](#) trope of the common baptism of the Rus people and asks for a "spirit of brotherly love". It asks God to, "in a foreign language, scold those who want and take up arms against Holy Russia – forbid and subvert their plans".

This war propaganda is intended to be read out in every Moscow Patriarchate church – including, grotesquely, those in Ukraine.

War-crime complicity?

It confirms that Kirill is in lockstep with Putin's war rhetoric and further exposes the patriarch to accusations of active complicity in war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide.

Recognising Kirill's complicity, a growing number of his bishops in Ukraine are refusing to commemorate the "patriarch of the military operation" in their church services, defying [threats from Moscow](#).

The words of influential propagandists can have real impact. Recognising this, the [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#) provides: 'Any propaganda for war shall be prohibited by law'.

International courts and tribunals since Nuremberg have attributed individual criminal responsibility not just to direct perpetrators of atrocities but also to accomplices – those who "aid or abet".

A person who aids or abets others to commit war crimes, crimes against humanity or genocide can be held criminally responsible. This is codified in, for example, the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC).

With questions over jurisdiction and criminal intent, and in the absence of any binding precedent, it is impossible to say whether an international prosecutor would consider charges against Kirill.

It is however conceivable that a prominent regime ideologist who launches a barrage of inciting propaganda before and during a conflict could be charged with aiding or abetting perpetration of war crimes or inciting others to genocide. Ultimately, whether Kirill is guilty of international crimes is a question that only a competent court or tribunal could answer.

On 26 February, [Ukraine launched proceedings](#) against the Russian Federation in the International Court of Justice, alleging genocide.

On 2 March the ICC Prosecutor decided to [proceed with investigations](#) into alleged crimes in Ukraine. Of course, the actual delivery of the authors of this war into the hands of international justice might be considered an even [greater miracle than making a Breguet watch disappear](#).

In any reckoning with the criminal responsibility of the Putin regime, Kirill and his subordinates will not be near the top of the list.

Nevertheless, there is no statute of limitations for war crimes and neither priestly status nor a cassock encrusted with expensive jewellery and metalwork can confer immunity from international laws. The European Union and member states must work to ensure that there is no impunity for Putin's propagandists.

Photo : Head of the Russian Orthodox Church, Patriarch Kirill, pictured here in 2012 minus his €23,000 gold watch (airbrushed out by the official press service, but still visible in reflection on table) (Photo: Russian Orthodox Church press service)

Putin recruits Muslims in his war in Ukraine

Putin hires Muslim fighters in his 'holy' war against Ukraine. Patriarch Kirill keeps silent about it and turns a blind eye

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

HRWF (29.03.2022) - <https://bit.ly/3JSOOQG> - In the name of the alleged defence of the "Russian World" and the Russian-speaking inhabitants of Ukraine (against their will), President Vladimir Putin has recently involved Muslims in his "special military operation in Ukraine": Chechen fighters who have gained a reputation as fierce warriors in two wars against Russia, the first from 1994 to 1996 and the second from 1999 to 2014 and mercenaries from Syria.

According to the [Middle East Monitor](#), the Russian Presidency had announced on 18 March that it had "opened the doors for volunteering to fight alongside Russia against Ukraine." And Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu said Moscow had received a large number of applications from various countries, noting that most of the applications were from the Middle East. Over 1000 in a few days, according to the Middle East Monitor which also said that President Bashar Al-Assad's regime had promised to pay the Syrian fighters generously.

A number of Muslim organizations in the "Russian world" are taking sides with President Putin in his war against Ukraine.

The Muftiate of the "Luhansk People's Republic" (LPR) is joining the foes of Ukraine

[The Muftiate of the so-called Luhansk People's Republic \(LPR\)](#) has just decided to leave the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Ukraine and to join the Spiritual Assembly of Muslims of Russia (SAMR).

As explained to the Russian Orthodox press agency [Interfax](#) on 22 March, "the Muslims of the Luhansk People's Republic disagree with the radical statements of the head of the Ukrainian Mufti's Office, Said Ismagilov, who accused Russian Muslims of killing civilians in Ukraine."

The petition for admission to the Russian Muftiate was signed by ten imams of the "LPR" led by the head of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the "Republic" Eldar Gambarov.

The appeal will be considered by the muftis on 29 March at the next meeting of the Mejlis of the Spiritual Assembly of Muslims of Russia. "Muslims living in the territory of the LPR adhere to a similar legal school in Islam. Most Muslims by nationality are Tatars, Bashkirs, Caucasians, children and grandchildren of Donbass miners. In this sense, the request of Muslims for canonical unity with the Spiritual Assembly of Muslims of Russia is completely logical," the press service of the Spiritual Assembly noted.

Noteworthy is that the heads of three Russian Muslim organizations have quickly backed the rhetoric of Vladimir Putin about the invasion of and the war in Ukraine:

- **Talgat Tajuddin, the head of the Central Spiritual Muslim Board of Russia**
- **Ismail Berdiyev, the head of the Coordination Center of Muslims of the North Caucasus**
- **Albir Krganov, the head of the Spiritual Assembly of Muslims of Russia**

Human Rights Without Frontiers has put those names on its [blacklist of religious leaders and institutions](#) which the EU, the US and the UK should include in their sanctions, according to the NGO.

Mufti Said Ismagilov of Ukraine urges Muslims NOT to become mercenaries in Russia's war against Ukraine

In a [video message](#), Mufti Said Ismagilov of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Ukraine called on all Muslims of the world not to participate in Putin's plan to destroy Ukraine.

"We have learned that the criminal Russian regime of Putin wants to recruit mercenaries from different countries to use them in the war against Ukraine. I call on Muslims around the world not to take sides with the criminal, aggressor or with Russia, which attacked and is killing us. It attacked our free and independent Ukraine, where Muslims lived happily and freely professed Islam. We are rightful citizens of our country and are now suffering from Russian aggression," the Mufti stressed.

"I call on all the Muslims of the world to take the side of Ukraine. Help us with prayers, donations and support because this is very important for us. I call on all mercenaries from the Middle East and other countries who have volunteered to be on the side of the Russian occupation not to do so. This will bring you neither happiness nor profit, but it will be a great crime," Mufti Ismagilov urged Muslims.

He assured that the Muslims of Ukraine have already come to the defense of their lands: "We are defending our state and will continue to defend it. I ask Allah to keep all mercenaries, especially Muslims, and all people from making such a big mistake. Be people of peace, justice and kindness."

Chechen Muslims after President Zelensky and antisemitism of Kadyrov

On 2 March, the [Washington Post](#) titled a paper of Timothy Bella "Assassination plot against Zelensky foiled and unit sent to kill him destroyed, Ukraine says."

"A recent alleged assassination plot against Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky was foiled over the weekend and the Chechen servicemen sent from Russia were destroyed, a Ukrainian security leader said Tuesday.

Oleksiy Danilov, the secretary of Ukraine's National Security and Defense Council, said during a [broadcast marathon](#) airing on Ukrainian TV channels that officials were recently tipped off that a unit of Kadyrovites, elite Chechen special forces, was on its way to kill Zelensky. After Ukrainian officials were informed by Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB), the Chechen special forces were killed Saturday on the outskirts of Kyiv, Danilov said."

In August 2019, [OC Media](#) reported that Ramzan Kadyrov caused anger among Israel's Russian community after making an anti-Semitic statement while addressing Chechens from Jordan, who had been invited by his Government on a cultural visit to the Chechen capital, Grozny.

In his hour-and-a-half speech on 13 August, Kadyrov said that ‘the prophet Muhammad killed the Jews, most of all’. He also called Jewish people ‘the main enemies of Islam’. The meeting was broadcast on Chechen state television. OC Media also reported other similar incidents.

If Chechen Muslims fighting with Putin’s army managed to capture or kill President Zelensky, who happens to be a Jew, this could be a major incident with unpredictable reverberation in the US, Europe and the Middle East.

Moreover, Zelensky recently revealed on [CNN](#) that his grandfather and his grandfather’s brothers all enlisted in the Soviet Red Army during WWII, and only his grandfather survived. In addition, [the parents of his grandfather died](#) when the Nazis burned their village.

The silence of Patriarch Kirill of the Russian Orthodox Church

Patriarch Kirill’s blessing of Putin’s war on Ukraine has caused a huge outcry of protest in the world as well as in the international religious community, and also divisions inside the Russian Orthodox Church.

Before the present-day war, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC) led by Metropolitan Onufriy in communion with Patriarch Kirill claimed 12,000 parishes, which is about a third of all the parishes of the Moscow Patriarchate. The independent Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU) led by Metropolitan Epiphanius claimed over 7000 with about 58% of the Orthodox population. It was created in December 2018 and granted autocephaly in January 2019 by the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople which has 260 million Orthodox worldwide.

Blessing a war the objectives of which are purely political with the hope of getting back a substantial amount of parishes and their rich assets is nonsense as Patriarch Kirill will lose the souls of the Ukrainian Orthodox.

Consolidating the grip of the Russian Orthodox Church in Ukraine, silently accepting the internal displacement of over 10 million Ukrainians and the “cleansing” of religious diversity in Ukraine as in Russia at the price of the involvement of foreign Muslims to do this dirty job is beyond any moral norm.

Although the war in Ukraine is not a religious war, Patriarch Kirill has opened a Pandora box of religious evil geniuses which might escape and lead to a lot of destruction inside and outside.

The Patriarch should better listen to his heavenly God than to the voice of Putin.

More Reading

Chechens fighting in Ukraine: Putin’s psychological weapon could backfire

<https://theconversation.com/chechens-fighting-in-ukraine-putins-psychological-weapon-could-backfire-179447>

Freemasonry in Russia and the war in Ukraine: "Be faithful to your obligations and oath to the Motherland."

Appeal of the Grand Master to the Brothers

HRWF (25.03.2022)

"Dear brothers in all your degrees and ranks!

Observing a bright, ambiguous reaction to the events taking place in the world today, I consider it my duty to address you with an open message.

First of all, I think it is appropriate to recall the basic truths of Freemasonry. Our ancient constitutions, all our rules and our spirit state the strictest ban on discussions about political and religious issues in our Lodges.

In order to avoid fraternal strife, this ban has a deeper moral character especially with regard to political issues. For a real Freemason, no matter how complex the outside world is, a sense of inner harmony, fraternal communication and continuity of the chain of communication of Masonic knowledge are the prevailing aspects of its existence.

Everything passes and only brotherhood seems eternal to us.

Therefore, I urge you to refrain from discussing political realities not only within the walls of the Temples, but also in profane debates, including social networks.

I advise the brothers holding state and military positions to read Andersen's Constitution carefully once again, especially in the part "On Civil Power, Supreme and Subordinate". Be faithful to your obligations and oath to the Motherland.

Andrey Bogdanov Is The Great Master Of The Grand Lodge Of Russia."

Photo : russianmasonry.ru

Friends and foes of Ukraine among religious leaders in Russia

Russian scholar Roman Lunkin analyzes the attitude of religious leaders about the war in Ukraine: Brief 'rating' of religious leaders in Russia by degree of loyalty to the Special operation in Ukraine. Human Rights Without Frontiers calls upon the EU, the US and the UK to extend their sanctions to the Russian religious leaders who support the war in Ukraine.

*See Black List 2 below.
See HRWF Black List 1 [here](#)*

Russia Religion News (14.03.2022) - The Russian religious studies scholar, sociologist, and political scientist Roman Lunkin composed a "brief rating of religious leaders of Russia by degree of their loyalty to the special operation in Ukraine," the Christian megaportal [inVictory](#) reports, citing the Facebook account of the author.

As Lunkin observed, the list includes those whom he noticed and recalled.

Direct support

Director of Ecclesiastical Assembly of Muslims of Russia, Albir Krganov;
Supreme mufti of the Central Ecclesiastical Board of Muslims of Russia, Talgat Tadzhuddin;
Chairman of the Ecclesiastical Board of Muslims of the republic of Tatarstan, Kamil Samigullin;
Mufti of Bashkiria, Ainur Birgalin;
Patriarch of Moscow and all-Rus Kirill (from 11 March, when explanations of the conflict were stated in a letter to the World Council of Churches);
Metropolitan of the Russian Orthodox Old-ritualist Church Kornily;
Protestant bishop of the Russian Churches of Christians of Evangelical Faith, Pavel Zhelnovakov (Izhevsk);
Pastor of a protestant church in Kostroma, Andrei Gusev;
Orthodox historian and publicist Feliks Razumovsky;
Orthodox historian and publicist, priest Ilia Soloviev;

Between a call for peace and direct support

Bishop Sergei Riakhovsky, head of Pentecostal union of the Russian Affiliated Council of Christian of Evangelical Faith, member of the Public Chamber of the R.F.

Calls for peace only

Head of the Ecclesiastical Board of Muslims of the R.F., Ravil Gainutdin;
Chairman of the Ecclesiastical Board of Muslims of Crimea and Sevastopol, Emirali Ablaev;
Archbishop of Evangelical Lutheran Church of Russia, Ditrikh Brauer;
Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ingria, Ivan Laptev;
Rector of the Moscow Theological Institute, Sergei Yastrzhemsky;
Pastor of Church of Embassy of Jesus in Nizhny Novgorod;
Conference of Catholic Bishops of Russia and Archbishop Pavel Petstsi ;
Prayer for peace by Bishop Nikolai Dubinin;
Baptist pastor Evgeny Bakhmutsky (Moscow);
Head of Buddhist Traditional Sangkha of Russia, Pandito Khambo Lama Damba Aiusheev;

Detailed active position for cessation of the conflict

Chief rabbi of Russia, Berl Lazar;
Head of the Union of Baptists of Russia, Petr Mitskevich (he is also head of the Union of Baptists of the whole Eurasian space, Transcaucasus, and Central Asia);

Bishop of Pentecostal Union of the Russian Church of Christians of Evangelical Faith, Eduard Grabovenko;
286 priests of the Russian Orthodox Church (appeal on 1 March 2022);

Against the military operation and condemnation of Russia and Russian Orthodox Church

Protestant opposition figures, Baptists Yury Sipko and Aleksei Markevich;
Orthodox activists and opposition figures Sergei Chapnin and Konstantin Eggert;
Pastor Albert Ratkin of the video channel Vsgliad s Nebesnoi;
Pastor of the "New Life" church in Ekaterinburg, Viktor Sudakov;
Archdeacon Andrei Kuraev;
Secretary General of the Russian Evangelical Alliance, Vitaly Vlasenko

Appeal to fellow countrymen by evangelical ministers of 3 March 2022

(as Aleksei Markevich notes, it was signed by about 500 persons, but it is impossible to confirm this now, since all signatures were secret inasmuch as, unlike the Orthodox appeal, the protestants essentially accused the Russian Federation of aggression). Apparently only the signatures of the principal signatories are public:

Yuri Ilchenko, Khabarovsk;
Evgeny Kokora, Novorossiisk;
Andrei Kravtsev, Nalchik;
Roman Nosach, St. Petersburg;
Aleksei Markevich, Moscow;
Pavel Togobitsky, Berdsk;
Viktor Fast, Solnechnyi;
Igor Shaifulin, Novosibirsk;
Mikhail Cherniavsky, Khabarovsk.

(tr. by PDS, posted 20 March 2022)

Photo : War ruins in Ukraine/Getty Images

Religious freedom for non-Orthodox/ Moscow Patriarchate doomed to disappear in Ukrainian lands under Putin's rule

Since the beginning of the occupation, the number of religious organizations in Crimea has been reduced by half, and that of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU) parishes independent from Moscow Patriarchate decreased by six times. This is what to be expected for any Ukrainian territory to be occupied or annexed by Putin. Moreover, all Jehovah's Witnesses communities will be banned.



RISU (19.03.2022) - <https://bit.ly/3IwOeX4> - After Crimea was occupied, the number of religious organizations has been reduced by half, and the number of parishes of the OCU decreased by more than six times.

Head of the State Service for Ethnic Policy and Freedom of Conscience Olena Bohdan made this statement during an online [press conference in Ukrinform](#) a few days ago.

"According to official data, before the occupation, at least 2,220 religious organizations representing 43 denominations operated on the Crimean Peninsula. As of the end of 2020, the Russian Federation has reported 907 religious organizations representing about 20 denominations. It means the number of religious organizations and denominations decreased by more than twice," Ms. Bohdan said.

She also noted the complicated situation with the Orthodox Church of Ukraine/ Patriarchate of Constantinople.

"Over the years of occupation, the activities of this church have become close to impossible. As of the beginning of 2014, the Crimean Diocese of the OCU consisted of 45 parishes, which were handled by 14 clergy members. However, at the beginning of 2022, the dioceses only had 7 parishes and 4 clergy members left. Thus, parishes decreased by more than 6 times, and clergymen by more than three times. In such conditions, the OCU is on the verge of disappearance and may be completely ousted from the temporarily occupied Crimea," Ms. Bohdan said.

At the same time, she stressed that actions aimed at seizing or destroying OCU church buildings in Yevpatoria could be qualified as war crimes from the point of view of the provisions of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

Bohdan added that such an organization as Jehovah's witnesses was banned in occupied Crimea as well. In 2017, the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation recognized it as extremist. At the end of January 2022, five people of this religious community were imprisoned in Crimea, and another nine were restricted in movement.

"The label of extremist activity is also put on the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar people since Crimean Tatars are mostly Muslims. When arrests are made on charges of "illegal missionary activity", Muslims and the Crimean Tatar ethnic identity suffer. This is because the Crimean Tatar community has always been taking an active regarding the need to return Crimea to the control of the Government of Ukraine," the head of the State Service for Ethnic Policy and Freedom of Conscience noted.

According to her, today, Baptists and Jews also fell under this article.

"Within the framework of such proceedings for the so-called "illegal missionary activity," in 2021, several resolutions were already adopted, and fines were collected in the amount of at least 370 thousand rubles. If we look at the entire period of occupation, the number of fines amounted to almost 2 million rubles," Ms. Bohdan said.

She recalled that one of the reasons for the persecution of Muslims is the fight against the political party Hizb ut-Tahrir, banned as an extremist organization, because this is a convenient way for propagandists to imprison someone who turned out to be inconvenient for Putin's rule.

Several cases in courts for 'illegal' missionary work

By Willy Fautré

HRWF with SOVA CENTER (18.03.2022) - Several religious leaders and communities are currently prosecuted for 'illegal' missionary work on the basis of Art. 5.26, Part 3, of the Administrative Code (implementation of activities by a religious organization without specifying its official full name, including the publication or distribution of literature with incomplete or knowingly false markings within the framework of missionary activities).

On 10 March 2022, the Prokhladnensky District Court of Kabardino-Balkaria found Timofey Boronin, pastor of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, guilty of 'illegal' missionary work and fined him 30,000 rubles.

The court decision states that "in 2021, near the Azbuka Flower store in Prokhladny, Timofey Boronin distributed, as part of missionary activities, religious literature to citizens that is not marked with the name of this organization in order to involve them in this structure." The pastor pleaded not guilty and intends to appeal this decision.

Earlier, the owner of this store Nina Boronina was [fined](#) for a similar offense. The community has also already been [fined](#).

This is also the case for the Evangelical Church "Teign of Faith", in the Samara region, but on 17 February, the church appealed to the Sixth Court of Cassation of General Jurisdiction.

This is the case as well for an Adventist Church in Kaspinsk (Republic of Dagestan), located on the Caspian See. The religious organization has appealed this decision.

On 18 February 2022, the Magistrate's Court of Judicial Precinct No. 31 of the Belogorsky Judicial District of the Republic of Crimea recognized L. Palyokha guilty of "illegal" missionary activities under Art. 5.26, Part 4 of the Administrative Code and fined it 7000 rubles.

The court considered that "by disseminating information about her faith to persons who are not members (followers) of her religious association, and without having a decision of the general meeting of the religious group to grant it appropriate powers," she had carried out illegal missionary activities.

On 16 February 2022, the Tutaevsky City Court of the Yaroslavl Region found Umejon Toshev, a citizen of Tajikistan, guilty under Art. 5.26, Part 5 of the Administrative Code (illegal missionary work). The court fined him 30,000 rubles with administrative expulsion from Russia.

The court concluded that Toshev, a foreign citizen, prayed and delivered a sermon without being a leader, a member of a collegial body or a priest of a religious organization, which constitutes the offence of 'illegal missionary work'.



(*) 1000 rubles – 10 dollars

A Tabligh Jamaat Muslim sentenced to 2 years in prison

In addition to severe restrictions to freedom of expression and missionary activities, members of banned peaceful, but so-called extremist, religious movements continue to be arrested and sentenced to prison terms for practicing their faith.

On March 16, 2022, it became known that the court in Saratov sentenced a 51-year-old local resident to two years in a general regime colony with restriction of liberty for a period of eight months under Part 2 of Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code (participation in the activities of an extremist organization) for involvement in the banned religious association [Tablighi Jamaat](#).

The case was [initiated](#) in April 2021. Representatives of the IC stated that the accused "positioned himself" as a supporter of Tablighi Jamaat, "directly organized and personally took part in regular meetings, during which extremist ideology was promoted among residents of the Saratov region, conducted explanatory work".

The Tablighi Jamaat religious movement was [banned](#) in Russia in 2009, without proper grounds in the opinion of SOVA Center in Moscow. 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 is unjustified, according to SOVA Center.

Special Bimonthly FORB Digest (01–15.03.2022)

15.03.2022 - The second appeal in Birobidzhan approved the sentence to Konstantin Guzev: 2.5 years of suspended sentence for faith in Jehovah God

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2022/03/151118.html>

On March 14, 2022, the court of the Jewish Autonomous Region, presided by judge Angela Sizova, having considered the case of Konstantin Guzev, ruled to make minor changes to the sentence that do not change its essence.

[Continue reading...](#)

11.03.2022 - In Vladikavkaz, five families of Jehovah's Witnesses were raided. Believers were released after long interrogations

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2022/03/111414.html>

On March 1, 2022, between 7 and 9 a.m. in the capital of the Republic of North Ossetia-Alania, representatives of the investigating authorities conducted inspections of the dwellings of

believers at 5 addresses. Five men were interrogated at the Center for Combating Extremism (CCE).

[Continue reading...](#)

11.03.2022 - Patriarchate priest fined for condemning war in Ukraine

On 10 March, a court fined Fr Ioann Burdin of the Moscow Patriarchate's Kostroma Diocese one month's average local wages for online remarks and a Sunday sermon in church condemning Russia's invasion of Ukraine and stressing the importance of the commandment, "Thou shalt not kill". The court decision is "a ban not only on expressing one's opinion but also even on professing one's religious beliefs".

[Continue reading...](#)

11.03.2022 - Orthodox priest convicted for criticism of Russia's aggression in Ukraine

A resident of Kostroma oblast was fined 35,000 rubles for discrediting Russian troops in a sermon, a Kostroma district court reports.

"The case of an administrative violation of law specified in part 1 of article 20.3.3 of the Code of Administrative Violations of Law of the R.F. against a citizen of the R.F. was reviewed. On 6 March the defendant, in a public place during the conduct of a religious service, in the presence of parishioners, by means of a public report about the attack by armed forces of the Russian Federation in Ukraine and ongoing shelling of Ukrainian cities . . . , discredited the use of the armed forces of the Russian Federation in defense of the interests of the Russian Federation and its citizens," the court's report says.

[Continue reading...](#)

10.03.2022 - Orthodox priest reportedly arrested in Russia for sermon decrying invasion of Ukraine

A Russian Orthodox priest was reportedly arrested this week after he preached a sermon denouncing the Russian invasion of Ukraine, an unusual example of the Russian government cracking down on a cleric from a faith tradition that has long operated in lockstep with President Vladimir Putin.

[Continue reading...](#)

10.03.2022 - Appeals court orders new trial for Jehovah's Witness

Link to full text in Russian: <https://cutt.ly/WSueMw7>

On 9 March, the [appeals] court in the Jewish autonomous oblast overturned the sentence of the Jehovah's Witness Svetlana Monis and returned the case for a new consideration. This was reported by a portal devoted to persecution of believers.

The believer was found guilty on 15 February 2021 of participating in the activity of a forbidden organization (part 2 of article 282.2 of CC) by a court in Birobidzhan and it sentenced her to a fine of 10,000 rubles. An appeals court increased the severity of the sentence on 12 May and gave Monis a suspended prison sentence of two and a half years. On 9 December, the ninth cassation court in Vladivostok remanded the case for a new review in the appeals court. (tr. by PDS, posted 10 March 2022)

[Continue reading...](#)

10.03.2022 - An appeal in Penza upheld the conviction of a married couple of Jehovah's Witnesses based in Nikolsk

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2022/03/101404.html>

On March 9, 2022 panel of judges of Penza regional court presided by Olga Podshibyakina did not satisfy the appeal of Peter and Maya Krupnovs against the sentence of the court of first instance - 2 years of suspended imprisonment for believing in God. The verdict came into force. The believers have the right to appeal the verdict in cassation as well as in international instances.

[Continue reading...](#)

10.03.2022 - Svetlana Monis' criminal case based on practicing her faith is routed to the original jurisdiction for a second hearing

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2022/03/101355.html>

On March 9, 2022 a panel of judges of the Court of the Jewish Autonomous Region, chaired by Elena Pyshkina, overturned the conviction of Jehovah's Witness Svetlana Monis. The case is returned to the Birobidzhan District Court for review by a new panel of judges.

[Continue reading...](#)

08.03.2022 - The ECHR issued two rulings in favor of 14 Jehovah's Witnesses. They complained about searches and detentions in 2010-2012

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2022/02/221644.html>

On February 22, 2022, the European Court of Human Rights published two rulings in which it found that Russian authorities had violated the believers' right to freedom of religion when they detained them while discussing the Bible or conducting searches or inspections of their homes and places of worship.

[Continue reading...](#)

07.03.2022 - Searches took place in the Khabarovsk territory. A believer, 60, was detained and placed in a pre-trial detention center

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2022/03/071359.html>

On March 3, 2022, at least 2 families of Jehovah's Witnesses were searched in the Knyaz-Volkonsky rural settlement (Khabarovsk Territory). Valeriy Rabota was detained and on March 6, by a court decision, was sent to a pre-trial detention center for 2 months.

[Continue reading...](#)

04.03.2022 - An appeal in the City Astrakhan upheld prison sentences for four Jehovah's Witnesses, including a woman

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2022/03/041654.html>

On March 3, 2022, the Astrakhan Regional Court upheld the harsh [sentence](#) for Jehovah's Witnesses: 8 years in prison for Yevgeniy Ivanov, Rustam Diarov and Sergey Klikunov, and 3.5 years in prison for Ivanov's wife, Olga.

[Continue reading...](#)

02.03.2022 - An appeal in Krasnoyarsk left unchanged vitaliy Sukhov's six-year suspended sentence for belief in Jehovah God

Link to full text in Russian : <https://jw-russia.org/news/2022/03/021053.html>

On March 1, 2022, Krasnoyarsk Territory court rejected the appeal of Vitaliy Sukhov, father of many children and confirmed the conviction — suspended sentence for "organization of religious speeches and worship".

[Continue reading...](#)

Orthodox priest reportedly arrested for sermon decrying invasion of Ukraine

The Rev. Ioann Burdin, who is also believed to have signed a petition condemning the invasion, was reportedly charged with 'discrediting the use of the Armed Forces'

By Jack Jenkins

RNS (10.03.2022) - <https://bit.ly/367vZtT> - A Russian Orthodox priest was reportedly arrested this week after he preached a sermon denouncing the Russian invasion of Ukraine, an unusual

example of the Russian government cracking down on a cleric from a faith tradition that has long operated in lockstep with President Vladimir Putin.

[According to a BBC report](#) citing Russian activists, the Rev. Ioann Burdin was charged with “discrediting the use of the Armed Forces” because of the sermon he preached on “Forgiveness Sunday.” The sermon included, among other things, descriptions of destruction inflicted on Ukraine by Russian forces.

Burdin, whose church is in the village of Karabanovo in western Russia about 80 miles outside Moscow, also reportedly shared anti-war images and a petition on the church’s website.

It was not immediately clear which petition Burdin posted, but his name appeared on a [public letter](#) signed by more than 285 Russian Orthodox priests and deacons over the past week calling for the “cessation of the fratricidal war” against Ukraine and bemoaning the “trial that our brothers and sisters in Ukraine were undeservedly subjected to.”

On Wednesday (March 9), the Very Rev. Andrey Kordochkin, a Russian Orthodox priest in Madrid who helped initiate the letter, confirmed to Religion News Service that the Burdin who signed the letter was the same one arrested this week.

“Yes, that’s him,” he said via text, adding that the arrested cleric’s case is expected to be considered by a court as early as Thursday.

Kordochkin later added that he has heard reports Burdin is currently facing fines instead of jail time, but expressed concern that making “calling for peace a criminal offense” amounts to a “warning” to others.

The arrest comes amid a [small but growing wave of dissent globally](#) among Russian Orthodox priests against the invasion. The clerics have directed their frustration at the political leaders responsible for the invasion — particularly Putin — but also, in many cases, at the head of their church, Patriarch Kirill of Moscow.

In Ukraine, some Russian Orthodox priests have stopped commemorating Kirill during their worship services, arguing that his statements about the war — which include references to “evil forces” in Ukraine — amount to a tacit endorsement of the attack. A few have even asked regional Russian Orthodox leaders in Ukraine to consider breaking away from the church, also known as autocephaly.

There is precedent for such a split: In 2018, many of Ukraine’s Orthodox Christians declared independence from the Orthodox Patriarchate in Russia. Kirill refused to recognize the independent Orthodox Church of Ukraine, but Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, head of the Orthodox Church in Constantinople, recognized it.

Others are pressing Kirill to intervene. On Wednesday, Metropolitan John of Dubna, an archbishop of Russian Orthodox churches in Western Europe, published an [open letter](#) asking Kirill to “raise (his) voice” with Russian authorities against the “monstrous and senseless war” in hopes that “this murderous conflict ceases as soon as possible.”

John also challenged Kirill’s characterization of the conflict as a “metaphysical battle.”

"With all the respect that is due to you, and from which I do not depart, but also with infinite pain, I must bring to your attention that I cannot subscribe to such a reading of the Gospel," the letter read.

Photo : Russian Orthodox Patriarch Kirill delivers the Christmas Liturgy in the Christ the Savior Cathedral in Moscow, Jan. 6, 2022. (AP Photo/Alexander Zemlianichenko)

Belligerent rhetoric of Patriarch Kirill of the Russian Orthodox Church in line with Putin's

Interfax-Religion/ HRWF (09.03.2022) - <https://bit.ly/360Vugq> - After a liturgy in the Cathedral of Christ the Savior, Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia strongly condemned external forces – Ukraine – for trying to divide the people of Russia and Ukraine:

"The issue of Russian-Ukrainian relations has now become part of the big or, as they now say, geopolitics, and **one of the purposes of this geopolitics is to weaken Russia**, which has become a strong, a really mighty country."

"How ugly and mean it is to use brotherly people to achieve these geopolitical goals, how terrible it is to set these people against their brothers, how terrible it is to arm them so that they start fighting against their brothers, with whom they have one blood and one faith!"

Calling **Russians and Ukrainians one strong people**, the patriarch said that "**the neighbors** who were scared by this strength started **doing everything to divide these people.**"

All those who are doing that are enemies of Russia and Ukraine, "and that means **they are against God's will, which is always aimed at peace, at brotherhood, at love**," the patriarch said.

"**The enemy of the human race is throwing lies into the relations between our peoples** through specific people, through specific associations of people," Patriarch Kirill said.

"**Where the devil is, there are always lies**, and today a huge amount of lies are being disseminated, **there is also this new fashionable word fake, as a synonym of a lie**. These are not fakes, these are not tricks, **these are regular devilish lies**," Patriarch Kirill said.

Photo : eaworldview.com - AFP

Jehovah's Witnesses flee Russia for worship without fear

By KWASI GYAMFI ASIEDU

AP (06.03.2022) - <https://bit.ly/3tMMqnL> - Over the past five years, hundreds of Jehovah's Witnesses have been subjected to raids, arrests and prosecution in Russia. Many others have fled – including one couple, Dmitrii and Nellia Antsybor, who flew to Mexico last year, walked across the U.S. border to seek asylum, and now hope to build a new life for themselves in Washington state.

After entering the U.S., the couple were separated and sent to different immigration detention centers; Nellia in Arizona, Dmitrii in California. Nearly three months passed before they reunited in late February.

Yet despite that ordeal, and missing her twin sister and her mother left behind in Russia, Nellia welcomes her newfound freedom in Federal Way, a suburb of Seattle.

"It is nice to not be afraid to gather with our brothers and sisters even if it is via Zoom," she said through a translator. "I have a sense of ease now."

One new source of concern: Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

"I am very worried about what's happening with my brothers and sisters in that country," Dmitrii said. "We pray for them."

About 5,000 Witnesses in Ukraine have left, seeking protection in other countries, said Jarrod Lopes, a U.S.-based spokesperson for the Jehovah's Witnesses.

For Witnesses in Russia – Lopes estimates there are about 170,000 of them – there's been anxiety since the country's Supreme Court declared the Christian denomination an extremist group in 2017.

Hundreds have been arrested and imprisoned. Their homes and places of worship, known as Kingdom Halls, have been raided, and the national headquarters seized. The Witnesses' modern, Russian-language translation of the Bible has been banned along with its globally circulated magazines, Awake and Watchtower.

Nellia said she and Dmitrii had long been on the radar of authorities in the cities where they lived. They decided to flee, she said, after her mother called in October and said police had a warrant for their arrest.

"To be a Jehovah's Witness in Russia is to be constantly in legal jeopardy, constantly in fear of either an invasion of your privacy, confiscation of your property, or in many cases, being locked up," said Jason Morton, a policy analyst at the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, a bipartisan federal agency that tracks religious freedom violations worldwide.

Last year, there were 105 guilty verdicts against Witnesses in Russia, according to the commission. The maximum sentences issued to them have increased from six to eight years

The Russian government has never given a detailed justification for the crackdown.

"I don't think that there's any reasonable person that can substantiate that the Witnesses are fundamentally extremists," said Emily Baran, a Middle Tennessee State University history professor. She has studied Soviet and post-Soviet Witness communities.

It is a label that even Russian President Vladimir Putin described as "complete nonsense" when asked about it in 2018.

"Jehovah's Witnesses are Christians, too, so I don't quite understand why (they) persecute them," he said.

Although Witnesses are Christians, they are guided by distinctive beliefs and practices, including the refusal of blood transfusions, abstinence from voting, conscientious objection to military service, and avoidance of participation in national ceremonies and holidays. Pre-pandemic, Witnesses engaged in door-to-door proselytizing, a key part of their faith.

Aside from Russia, Witnesses experience persecution in several former Soviet republics, including Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan. One notable case is the imprisonment of a 70-year-old Tajik citizen, Shamil Khakimov, who received a seven-year sentence in 2019.

In Eritrea, where military conscription is mandatory, there are several Witnesses in prison. In South Korea, where most young men must perform military service, Witnesses were routinely imprisoned for refusing until a 2018 court decision affirmed their rights to conscientious objection.

The Witnesses "seem to really ruffle the feathers of your more authoritarian-minded governments who require a baseline of participation in the state," Morton said. "The fact that they want to remain separate from some of the typical functions of celebrating the state or participating in certain state rituals puts them on the radar."

The recent crackdown is not the first endured by Witnesses in Russia. During the Soviet era, they were deported to remote areas of Siberia. They often faced employment discrimination and lost custody of their children.

"They didn't do the kinds of performative aspects of being part of Soviet life," said Baran.

The denomination's American origins put Witnesses under scrutiny during the Cold War, Baran said. "Because they were part of an international religious group, the Soviet Union thought this was evidence of a larger capitalist conspiracy."

Nellia and Dmitrii decided to flee Russia after weeks of playing hide-and-seek with police officers and disguising their appearances to outwit security cameras.

"We figured that they would eventually find us," Dmitrii said.

They left on a one-way flight from Moscow to the resort city of Cancun, Mexico. After a brief stay, they flew to the border town of Mexicali in December, then approached U.S. border agents to request asylum.

While in U.S. detention, the couple celebrated their 12th anniversary and Nellia continued her tradition of writing love poems to mark the occasion.

"I beg God that this time passes quickly and better times are ahead," she wrote. "My beloved, wait for me, wait for me, and don't be overly sad about me."

Dmitrii said he studied tax law in Russia, but now hopes to be licensed as a truck driver – if he can avoid long hauls that would take him far from his wife. Nellia isn't sure what job she might pursue.

The Antsybors are among many Witnesses – likely several thousand, according to Lopes -- who have fled Russia since the crackdown began in 2017. Many have found refuge in other European countries.

Evgeniy Kandaurov fled Russia with his wife in August 2021 and has resettled in Germany. He said their home was raided by police officers in February 2021 with an officer of the internal intelligence agency giving orders remotely.

The officers took custody of bags of their belongings, including all but one wedding photo.

Kandaurov, whose father was a Communist, became interested in the Jehovah's Witnesses after two years of army service. He was baptized in 1994 and became a "special pioneer", expected to devote at least 130 hours each month to ministry work.

He traveled across Russia to advocate for the rights of Witnesses to evangelize and worship peacefully, often helping those who had encounters with police.

"This was in fact my favorite form of service: defending our rights in court," he said in an interview from his new home in Wiesbaden, a town west of Frankfurt.

Kandaurov said he was interrogated for several hours on multiple occasions.

"We couldn't sleep: every knock at the door, every heavy footstep out in the hallway, it deprived us of our sleep, it was nerve-racking," he said.

Last summer, he and his wife left Russia - driving through Moldova and Ukraine, then flying to Germany. Their modest belongings included their one surviving wedding photo.

He now spends much of his time writing to those left behind and worshiping on Zoom with his new friends, thankful to be practicing his faith freely.

"I don't have to whisper," he said.

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Photo : Dmitrii and Nellia Antsybor, who are from Russia and sought asylum in the United States in 2021, pose for a photo, Monday, Feb. 28, 2022, at the home where they are living in Federal Way, Wash., as they hold Jehovah's Witness Watchtower literature printed in Russian. Over the past several years, hundreds of Jehovah's Witnesses have been subjected to raids, arrests and prosecution in Russia, and many have fled to other countries hoping to find religious freedom and build new lives for themselves. (AP Photo/Ted S. Warren)

Address of the Conference of Catholic Bishops of Russia about the war in Ukraine

Moscow, February 24, 2022

Beloved brothers and sisters in Christ,
dear brothers in the priesthood!

We, like all of you, are deeply shocked that, despite huge reconciliation efforts, the political conflict between Russia and Ukraine has turned into an armed confrontation. This confrontation brings death and destruction and threatens the security of the whole world. The peoples of our countries are united not only by a common history, but also by the general huge suffering that has fallen on us in the past because of the madness of war. Our peoples deserve peace, not only as a lack of war, but a peace that is a firm determination to respect other people, other peoples and their dignity. Let our contemporaries know that they will have to give a strict account of the military actions they have taken. After all, the course of the coming centuries largely depends on their current decisions (cf. Const.*Lumen gentium*, 78, 80).

We call on all politicians on whom this decision depends to do everything decisively to end this conflict. "God is the God of peace, not war, the Father of all, not just some, and He wants us to be brothers, not enemies," Pope Francis addresses us. And we also appeal to all people, especially fellow Christians, to resist lies and hatred, and to be a source of reconciliation, not an increase in hatred and violence.

We ask all our believers to devote these days to intensive prayer and fasting to save human lives - especially on Ash Wednesday, March 2, responding to the call of the Holy Father. Priests are asked to serve the Holy Mass for the preservation of peace and justice, using the Eucharistic prayer for reconciliation, and reading the prayer from the demand book "On Peace and Fatherland".

Conference of Catholic Bishops of Russia

Archbishop Pavel Pezzi
Metropolitan of the Archdiocese of the Mother of God in Moscow
Chairman

Bishop Joseph Werth
Ordinary of the Transfiguration Diocese in Novosibirsk

Bishop Clemens Pickel
Ordinary of the Diocese of St. Clement in Saratov

Bishop Kirill Klimovich
Ordinary of the Diocese of St. Joseph in Irkutsk

Bishop Nikolai Dubinin
Auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese of the Mother of God in Moscow

Source: <http://catholic-russia.ru/2022/obrashhenie-konferenczii-katolicheskikh-episkopov-rossii/>

HRWF Footnote

Noteworthy is the fact that the Conference of Catholic Bishops of Russia does not use the rhetoric of President Vladimir Putin, unlike the Russian Orthodox Church and several other religious denominations in Russia taking sides with him. See HRWF research paper [here](#).

Russian religious leaders and movements to be sanctioned – Black List 1

Human Rights Without Frontiers recommends that the EU, the UK and the US put on their lists of sanctions a number of religious revisionist leaders and entities endorsing the rhetoric of President Vladimir Putin about the “non-war” and the “non-invasion” of Ukraine

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

HRWF (05.03.2022) - Political instrumentalization of a wide range of religions and their leaders which had been dozing since the collapse of the Soviet Union is being woken up from its post-Communist lethargy and revitalized by the Cold War veteran Vladimir Putin.

Human Rights Without Frontiers is publishing a first list of religious leaders who under the guise of calling for peace should be added to the existing lists of sanctions for their collaboration with President Vladimir Putin in his disinformation campaign in Russia and outside. Believers of many faiths who are part of public opinion in Russia are being deceived by such shepherds.

Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia

On 23 February, one day before the invasion of Ukraine, Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia [congratulated](#) Russian President Vladimir Putin on Defender of the Fatherland Day and wished him peace of mind, health and God's help in his ministry, according to the message published on the website of the Russian Orthodox Church:

"I cordially congratulate you on Defender of the Fatherland Day. <...> I wish you good health, peace of mind and abundant help from the Lord in your high and responsible service to the people of Russia."

On 27 February, Patriarch Kirill declared “about the events going on in Ukraine,” in his [homily](#) on Sunday 27 February, at the Cathedral Church of Christ the Saviour:

“God forbid that the present political situation in fraternal Ukraine so close to us should be aimed at making the evil forces that have always strived against the unity of Rus’ and the Russian Church, gain the upper hand.”

It must not be allowed to give the dark and hostile external forces an occasion to laugh at us; we should do everything to preserve peace between our peoples while protecting our common historical Motherland against every outside action that can destroy this unity.

“Wherfrom has the Russian land come, the land which now includes Russia and Ukraine and Belarus and other tribes and peoples. That the Lord may protect the Russian land against external enemies, against internal disorders, that the unity of our Church may strengthen and that by God’s mercy all the temptations, diabolical attacks, provocations may retreat and that our devout people in Ukraine may enjoy peace and tranquillity - these are our prayers today.”

On 3 March, Patriarch Kirill published [a new prayer](#) for peace - for a “united” **Holy Russia**. Metropolitan Dionisy of Voskresensk, administrator of the Moscow Patriarchate, sent a circular letter to all the diocesan bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church, with the text of a prayer.

The new prayer does not mention Ukraine at all, but speaks of the “Holy Russia”, originating from the one Baptismal Font [there are various Russian versions about it: the generally accepted one is in Kiev, the alternative - in Chersonesos (Crimea)]. **According to the new prayer, the Holy Russia has been "attacked by foreign nations", "desiring war", and their designs must be destroyed.**

For Patriarch Kirill, Ukraine has already disappeared from the European map and is now part of the territorially historical Holy Russia.

The Spiritual Council of the Russian United Union of Christians of the Evangelical Faith (Pentecostals) (ROSHWE)

The ROSHWE called on its people to unite in prayer for peace in Ukraine, this being to be understood as Putin’s conception of “peace” as it is clearly explained hereafter:

“We pray that the world will recover as soon as possible, that order and tranquility reign in the near future, we pray for all world leaders, that the Lord will give them wisdom in the current situation, for the implementation of God’s will for Russia, Ukraine, all countries of Europe and the world,” the statement of the spiritual council at the disposal of [RIA Novosti](#) reads.

“[Russia](#) began a military operation to demilitarize Ukraine early on Thursday morning, February 24. In a televised address to the Russians, President Vladimir Putin said that the circumstances ‘require decisive and immediate action from us, the people’s republics [of Donbass](#) asked for help.’”

According to the Russian leader, all responsibility for the bloodshed will be **on the conscience of the ruling regime in Ukraine**. He called on the Ukrainian military not to comply with the criminal orders of the Ukrainian authorities, lay down their weapons and go home. (...)

Later, the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation stressed that **the Russian Armed Forces do not strike any strikes on the cities of Ukraine: military infrastructure is disabled by high-precision means.** According to the agency, **the civilian population is not threatened.** Later, the Ministry of Defense added that **Ukrainian border guards “do not resist”, in some cases the Ukrainian military surrenders** and after that have the opportunity to return to their families.

Berl Lazar, the Chief Rabbi of Russia Berl Lazar called on spiritual leaders to stand for peace in Ukraine

[**Chief Rabbi of Russia Berl Lazar**](#) called on religious leaders to stand together for “peace in Ukraine” and offered “any mediation,” saying:

“Russia began a military operation in Ukraine early on Thursday morning, February 24. President Vladimir Putin called it its goal ‘**to protect people who have been bullied for eight years, genocide by the Kiev regime.**’ To do this, according to him, it is planned to carry out ‘**demilitarization and denazification of Ukraine**’, to bring to justice all **war criminals** responsible for ‘**bloody crimes against civilians**’ of Donbass.”

According to the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation, **the Armed Forces strike only military infrastructure and Ukrainian troops, the civilian population is not in danger.** With the support of the Russian Armed Forces, the offensive of the DPR and LPR groups are developing. But **we are not talking about the occupation of Ukraine, the President of Russia emphasized.** The Russian Defense Ministry reports a number of **cases of voluntary addition of weapons by Ukrainian troops - they are guaranteed security and return to their families.** Meanwhile, **Ukrainian security forces place multiple launch systems directly in residential areas of Kiev and other Ukrainian cities.** Putin called it terrorist tactics.”

Moreover, in an article published today 5 March, and titled “Federation of Jewish Communities of Russia President (FJCR): Outbreak of Russophobia in Europe over events in Ukraine unacceptable,” Alexander Boroda, its president, said that he is “outraged by manifestations of Russophobia in Europe amid the Russian military operation in Ukraine.” And he added ““I'd really like to believe that this is not true. Because it was precisely the Crystal Night, or the Night of Broken Glass, that preceded the long years of Nazi triumph,”

Leaders of the Muslim community of Russia

- **Talgat Tajuddin, the head of the Central Spiritual Muslim Board of Russia**
- **Ismail Berdiyev, the head of the Coordination Center of Muslims of the North Caucasus**
- **Albir Krganov, the head of the Spiritual Assembly of Muslims of Russia**

On 2 March, the [**Russian Interfax agency**](#) published an article titled “Leading Russian muftis support military operation in Ukraine”:

“The leaders of the Muslim community of Russia came out in **support of the special military operation of Russia in Ukraine** and said they were praying for the understanding of the Ukrainian leadership.

"This is a justified, forced measure. When Nazism and fascism are reviving next to us, when the West is even trying to set its own brothers against each other, it is impossible to consider it normal. If there is a threat that missiles will be able to reach the capital of our Motherland in five to seven minutes, and even to Ufa, Kazan, and other Russian cities, who will tolerate this!" the head of the Central Spiritual Muslim Board of Russia Talgat Tajuddin told *Interfax* on Wednesday.

In his opinion, the current military operation in Ukraine is "actually a compulsion to peace."

In turn, the head of the Coordination Center of Muslims of the North Caucasus, Ismail Berdiyev, told *Interfax* that war is always bad and that no normal person will be happy that there is a war. **"But what is happening now in Ukraine is already a forced measure,"** the mufti stressed.

(...)

According to the head of the Spiritual Assembly of Muslims of Russia Albir Krganov, Muslims have watched with pain what has been happening in recent years in "fraternal Ukraine". "We empathize with the Ukrainian people and understand that now is a very difficult time for them," he continued. **"But we have not forgotten what atrocities were committed there by ultranationalists, who, for example, burned people alive."**

"We would not like this to be transferred to our territory, but there were all the prerequisites for this, preparations were underway, and **Ukraine was being prepared as a springboard for an attack on our country,**" the mufti told *Interfax*. (...)

Damba Ayusheyev, the head of the Russian Buddhist Traditional Sangha,

On 3 March, the Russian *Interfax* agency published an article titled "The Russian Buddhists' head supports the military operation in Ukraine:

"The head of the Buddhist Traditional Sangha of Russia, Damba Ayusheyev, addressed some words of support to the Russian soldiers who are participating in a special operation on the territory of Ukraine.

"I do not hope, but I know that our guys, brave and courageous, do not carry the glory of Genghis Khan for nothing. Almost every generation of us participates in the protection of the interests of our Fatherland in Afghanistan, Syria (...) We are worried about our brothers and sons who are now in difficult military conditions. We pray for their well-being and for their return to their families," the head of the Buddhists of Russia told reporters.

He expressed sympathy to the parents whose children are now in Ukraine, and urged them to understand that "this is the only way we can protect our country, preserve and pass on our wealth to future generations."

Ayusheyev recalled that Buddhists should maintain peace, maintain harmony and calm. **"However, we live in a unified Russian state and protect the interests of our country, against which a dirty information war is being waged. We must have a strong and reliable rear (...) Buddha is with us!"** he concluded."

Conclusion

Western strategists are quite often not aware of the political instrumentalization of religions and their leaders. The Soviet Union and its satellites had been real masters in this sort of mental manipulation and infeudation of the minds and the souls, creating movements such as the “priests for peace,” during the Cold War, which were parroting the Communist propaganda to morally disarm the West.

This battlefield should not be underestimated and neglected.

The end of unity: How the Russian Orthodox Church lost Ukraine



[Regina Elsner](#), a researcher at the Centre for East European and International Studies (ZoIs).

[ZoIs](#) (03.03.2022) - Since the end of the Soviet Union, dozens of theologians and scholars of religion elaborated on the complicated relationship within the church community of the so-called Holy Rus'. The Moscow Patriarchate defines its territory of spiritual responsibility in the borders of the Soviet Union—except for the old churches of Armenia and Georgia. The core of this spiritual community is Kyiv as the place of baptism of Rus' in 988 and Moscow as the residency of the head of the church, today Patriarch Kirill. Bitter as it is, the territory of the Soviet Union was always closer to the ecclesiastical understanding of this sacred territory than the Russian Federation and its independent neighbor states, and the Russian Orthodox Church made comprehensive theological, historiographical, and political efforts to design the unity of the people in a new way.

As in other places of the world, national independence has finally caused the establishment of an independent Orthodox Church in Ukraine. However, it was not Moscow as mother-church to release the Ukrainian Orthodoxy in its independence, because that would have questioned the unity of the one tradition. For three decades, the Moscow Patriarchate succeeded in its concept of spiritual unity by underlining its respect for national sovereignty. This was a balancing act, but most Ukrainian Orthodox and global Orthodoxy committed to this concept and refused to acknowledge the self-proclaimed Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kyivan Patriarchate in 1992.

The concept started to fail when, simultaneously, the Moscow Patriarchate strengthened its ideology of a common Orthodox civilization united by a conservative set of values and, on the other side, Ukrainian society engaged increasingly in European integration. During the first Maidan, or “Orange Revolution” in 2004, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate (UOC-MP) managed to handle the diverging claims from Russia and the West mainly due to the conservative agenda of the ruling elites in Ukraine. The second Maidan in 2014, the “Revolution of Dignity” with its clear pro-European political stance, however,

challenged the attitude of unity seriously, as did the annexation of Crimea and the war in Donbas, the violation of the national borders of Ukraine by Russia.

To maintain the reality of unity, the reaction of the Russian Orthodox Church was a slight yet effective shift in its ideology. Since 2014, the ideology of the "Russian World" ceased from official ecclesiastical statements as the church tried to avoid being equated to Russia's imperial claims on sovereign nations. As a new frame, the defense of persecuted Christians evolved. With this concept, the Moscow Patriarchate not only legitimated Russia's participation in the war in Syria and paramilitary activities in Africa. It also used the human rights framework to justify these state actions and its involvement in the territory of other Orthodox Churches. Since 2018, the Moscow Patriarchate systematically supplemented its concept of persecuted Christians in Ukraine with a massive campaign concerning violent attacks on property and believers of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

Granted, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate had to face massive social and media pressure due to its remaining ties with the church of the aggressor state, suffering violent attacks and misleading legal initiatives like the draft law on renaming the church. These are cases of undermining religious freedom. The church vanished in the public discourse in Ukraine, trapped between its spiritual bonds with Moscow and its Ukrainian identity. Unfortunately, the Russian Orthodox Church refused to acknowledge both. While the Ukrainian Metropolitan Onufry became silent on almost all social and political issues in Ukraine to avoid new accusations, the Russian church leadership enforced its spiritual and socio-cultural claims on Ukraine. The discourse about the spiritual unity of Holy Rus', meaning Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine, increased to counter the engagement of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. It reached the level of negating the Ukrainian identity of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church as a whole. After years of trying to keep the balance, the ROC joined the state propaganda about Ukraine as an inherent part of Russian identity and space of influence.

When the escalation of the full-fledged war in Ukraine was inevitable, the religious world watched the Moscow Patriarchate turn its back to Ukraine. When analyzing the reaction of Patriarch Kirill, the different meanings of words said and not said should be recognized because they will serve as a point of reference in future talks about the role of the church in this war. On the one side, the Patriarch and other speakers for the church (Metropolitan Hilarion, chair of the external office; Vladimir Legojda, head of the information department) demand peace, a dialogue for all conflicting sides, and a prayer for peace. In all statements on Ukraine, they also refer to the unity of the Christians in Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia and to the special responsibility of the Moscow Patriarchate for these regions. Metropolitan Hilarion claimed several days before the invasion that "War is not a method of solving the accumulated political problems."

This quote now is used as a sign of dissent to the war within the ROC; however, the main focus of Hilarion in this interview is accusing the West of sharpening the "accumulated political problems," and his commitment against war remains in general terms. The Patriarch did not contradict the words of "persecuted Christians," which Putin used to justify his war against Ukraine on 21 February 2022. Until 4 March, neither the Patriarch nor any other speaker of the ROC used the word *war* to describe the situation in Ukraine. When monitoring the news on the website of the Moscow Patriarchate since 21 February, there are more reports about the activities of the ROC in Africa than about the situation in Ukraine, not counting several unconfirmed hints of alleged Ukrainian violence against churches of the UOC-MP, legitimizing armed acts of "defense." There are no reports or pictures about the massive destruction of Ukrainian cities and cultural sites and no links to the statements by the hierarchy from the UOC-MP.

On the other side, we have to take into account the open support of the Russian military one day before the outbreak of war, when Russian armed forces were already arranged at

the border to Ukraine in Russia and Belarus. On 23 February, Patriarch Kirill congratulated the heads of the Russian government on the occasion of the Day of the Defenders of the Fatherland, a Soviet tradition of glorifying veterans and male armed power. In his speech on that day, he said,

We live in peaceful times, but we know that even in peacetime there are threats. Unfortunately, even at the moment, there are threats—everyone is familiar with what is happening on the borders of our Fatherland. Therefore, I think that our military personnel cannot have any doubts that they have chosen a very correct path in their lives. Because by following this path, you are protecting the people even without any military action. The strength of the Armed Forces, the might of the Russian army is already a weapon that protects our people. But in order for these weapons to be taken seriously by those who have bad intentions, the Armed Forces of our country must always be on alert.

Finally, in his sermon on 27 February, after ensuring his awareness of the “difficult circumstances encountered today by the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate,” the Patriarch stated,

It must not be allowed to give the dark and hostile external forces an occasion to laugh at us; we should do everything to preserve peace between our peoples while protecting our common historical Motherland against every outside action that can destroy this unity.

He said this, remarkably, on the fifth day of heavy shelling of Russian arms on the peaceful—Orthodox—civilians in Ukraine. This implies the prolongation of the narrative that the violence is provoked by the West and justified as a defense. It is a scandalous ignorance of the situation of the people in Ukraine, which he claims to defend, a deliberate reversal of perpetrator and victim, and it is in open support of the ideology of the murderous regime. This statement marks a final split between Russian and Ukrainian Orthodoxy, even if this split is not a canonical one. This split, however, is not demanded or intended by the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, whose bishops and priests appealed to Moscow for support in naming the reality. This split is performed by the Moscow Patriarchate itself through the refusal to take pastoral responsibility for its flock. Such a situation is unique in the history of Orthodoxy and will provoke further theological and canonical debates within global Orthodoxy. To be clear, praying for peace is, without doubt, an important instrument of the church to impact conflict dynamics. When at the same time they neglect the very fact of war and its victims and warmongers, these prayers become false and dangerous.

“Evil forces” fight against Putin’s army in Ukraine, Patriarch Kirill says

The Russian army is fighting against “evil forces” in Ukraine, according to Patriarch Kirill of the Russian Orthodox Church while the Russian army is the aggressor and the Ukrainian people is the victim

By Willy Fautré, *Human Rights Without Frontiers*

HRWF (03.03.2022) - Surprisingly and shockingly, Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia declared “about the events going on in Ukraine,” in his homily on Sunday 27 February, at the Cathedral Church of Christ the Saviour:

“God forbid that the present political situation in fraternal Ukraine so close to us should be aimed at making the evil forces that have always strived against the unity of Rus’ and the Russian Church, gain the upper hand.”

The proximity between the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) and the Kremlin is however not only physical, as they are only a few hundred meters from each other, but it is also political, geopolitical and spiritual.

In a long article titled “The Law, the Rights and the Rules,” and published in The Diplomat Magazine in July 2021, Sergey Lavrov, Russian Minister of Foreign affairs, criticized the “aggressive LGBT propaganda” by the “enlightened Europe”, the US interference in church affairs, openly seeking to drive a wedge into the Orthodox world, whose values are viewed as a powerful spiritual obstacle for the liberal concept of boundless permissiveness.”

Quite often, Patriarch Kirill has presented President Putin as the sole defender of Christianity in the world and even as the savior of Christians in Syria after he had sent his troops to save Bashar al-Assad and his regime.

Last but not least, on 23 February, one day before the invasion of Ukraine, Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia [congratulated](#) Russian President Vladimir Putin on Defender of the Fatherland Day and wished him peace of mind, health and God's help in his ministry, according to the message published on the website of the Russian Orthodox Church:

“I cordially congratulate you on Defender of the Fatherland Day. <...> I wish you good health, peace of mind and abundant help from the Lord in your high and responsible service to the people of Russia.”

Calling afterwards for “the restoration of good fraternal relations between our peoples,” Patriarch Kirill clarified in his 28 February homely what he means by “fraternal relations” when he said:

“A guarantee of this fellowship is our united Orthodox Church represented in Ukraine by the Ukrainian Orthodox Church headed by His Beatitude Onuphry.”

Metropolitan Onufry of Kiev and All Ukraine is the Primate of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, Moscow Patriarchate, but under President Poroshenko, a national Orthodox Church, the Orthodox Church of Ukraine affiliated to the Patriarchate of Constantinople has emerged and has challenged Moscow.

And for those who might not have understood the core message of his homily, Patriarch Kirill insisted that the Ukrainians are the attackers and part of the evil forces, when he said “*We prayed that the Lord may give them strength and wisdom to repulse the attacks of the evil one.*”

Further in his homily, he points at the West as the enemy of the Russian Orthodox Church and the Russian people:

It must not be allowed to give the dark and hostile external forces an occasion to laugh at us; we should do everything to preserve peace between our peoples while protecting our common historical Motherland against every outside action that can destroy this unity.

While the EU, the UK and the USA are not at war with the Russian Orthodox Church and the Orthodox believers, Patriarch Kirill is spiritually at war with the “so-called decadent values of the West” when he concludes:

“Wherfrom has the Russian land come”, the land which now includes Russia and Ukraine and Belarus and other tribes and peoples. That the Lord may protect the Russian land against external enemies, against internal disorders, that the unity of our Church may strengthen and that by God’s mercy all the temptations, diabolical attacks, provocations may retreat and that our devout people in Ukraine may enjoy peace and tranquillity - these are our prayers today.

In this warlike language, the Orthodox world and the Russian world end up overlapping and merging. They announce the final regional objective of the current war against Ukraine.

Photo: pinterest.com

Priests of the Russian Orthodox Church call for reconciliation and ending the war

RFE/RL (01.03.2022) - <https://bit.ly/36Vg0Q5> - “Representatives of the clergy of the Russian Orthodox Church called for an end to the war in Ukraine by addressing “everyone on whom it depends.” In an open appeal, priests and deacons write that the “brotherly war” will lead to the abyss of relations between Russians and Ukrainians, and declare their grief for the test to which “our brothers and sisters in Ukraine have been undeservedly subjected.”

The appeal is distributed online on March 1. At the time of publication, it was signed by more than 130 people. It emphasizes that signatories apply “on their own behalf”, that is, not on behalf of the church - this prohibits canon law for priests. In the text, the authors write that they want “the return of all soldiers - both Russian and Ukrainian - to their homes.” “We respect God-given human freedom and believe that the people of Ukraine should make their choice on their own, not at the gunpoint, without pressure from the West or the East,” the appeal reads.

The text appeared against the background of growing intra-church criticism of the Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church, Patriarch Kirill (Gundyayev). He is accused of not expressing a sufficiently clear anti-war position after the outbreak of the war in Ukraine. At the time of publication of the news, there was not a single mention of the war on the main page of the Moscow Patriarchate website.

Against this background, a statement by priests appeared on the website of the Sumy diocese, located in the heart of the historical ROC, that they stop commemorating the patriarch during church services. In church language, this actually means that priests do not recognize it as part of the church. “We are forced to admit with particular sorrow that in these terrible days His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia did not condemn the aggressive actions of the Russian authorities,” their address reads.

They stressed that they continue to consider themselves part of the Russian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate, which is part of the Russian Orthodox Church, and expressed support for its Primate, Metropolitan Onufry (Berezovsky), who condemned the aggression.

Stop the war."

List of signatories [here](#) (Automatic update)

194 as of 1 March 2022

Priests and deacons of the Russian Orthodox Church who wish to sign the letter can write to russianpriestsforpeace@gmail.com

Ukrainian and Russian Orthodox priests against the war

In many Ukrainian churches of the Moscow Patriarchate, the name of Patriarch Kirill was not mentioned during Sunday liturgies. The Moscow Orthodox hierarchy allegedly did not approve of the invasion. From the conflict a possible push for the reunion of all the Churches of Ukraine.

by Vladimir Rozanskij

AsiaNews (28.02.2022) - <https://bit.ly/36ZP0Pz> - The Russian war against Ukraine is putting a severe strain on the Orthodox Christian faith, to which both peoples in the conflict belong. In many Ukrainian Orthodox Churches belonging to the patriarchate of Moscow, the name of Patriarch Kirill was not recalled during Sunday liturgies, causing many faithful to turn away from the Russian Church.

The Metropolitan of the autocephalous Church Epifanyj (Dumenko) appealed to Kirill to intercede with President Putin to stop the war. The Patriarch of Moscow, in turn, issued an appeal for "the Lord to protect Russian land", specifying that he was referring to "Kievan Rus", from which Russia, Ukraine and Belarus originated".

The website Meduza.ru has gathered the testimony of several priests divided on the military operations, but united in their ecclesial belonging. Proto-priest Nikolai Bandurin is parish priest in the church in the village of Andreevo-Melentevo in the Rostov region, bordering the Donbass, 30 kilometres from the most disputed border. In his opinion, "it was time for some order in Ukraine, President Putin is right... God is with us, and He loves everyone, we must pray and hope that everything will go well".

Protoierej Aleksej Uminskij, on the other hand, is the parish priest of the Holy Trinity Church in Moscow's Khokhly ("Ukrainians") district, and says he cannot support his country's military actions. "I pray for peace, I pray that all this ends as soon as possible, and that as few people as possible suffer from it".



Human Rights Without Frontiers FoRB Russia

Fr. Aleksej quotes the words of Moscow Patriarch Kirill (Gundjaev) and the Russian Metropolitan of Kiev Onufryj (Berezovskij), who called the Russian invasion a "fratricidal war... our hierarchy has not approved this military action at all, it is a tragedy without justification or explanation". Uminsky notes with regret that 'there is a strong division among the people with respect to the war, it is a war among us, even among those who come to church and take communion at the one chalice'.

The Orthodox Church in Russia is very disoriented, while in Ukraine the people are rallying around their pastors in the face of aggression. **Protoierej Aleksej Pelevin**, who directs the charitable sector of the eparchy of Kaluga, in southern Russia, recalls the words of the Gospel: "There is no greater love than to give one's life for one's friends".

He maintains that each Russian soldier fulfils this commandment, and the Church "has always blessed those who put themselves at the service of the defence of their homeland: we pray for all our soldiers, as the liturgical litanies also prescribe, in Ukraine as in Syria and throughout the world". Fr Aleksej tries to welcome refugees from Donbass, as Patriarch Kirill has recommended.

Fr. Aleksandr Satomsky, on the other hand, looks after the Church of the Epiphany in Yaroslavl, central Russia, and does not intend to expound his thoughts on the ongoing war, "because it could divide people, and division is the work of the devil, but I know that for God there are no useless people, and Jesus went up on the cross for everyone, without looking at who is right and who is wrong.... we pray that the light of reason triumphs!".

The Metropolitan of Belgorod, Ioann (Popov), who leads his Church in a region bordering Ukraine, says that "when there is a war, priests should only pray for peace. We do not understand what happens, and in these cases we must pray that God enlightens our minds, that love wins and peace is restored... there will never be love as long as we continue to destroy one another".

The Metropolitan recalled that the Orthodox liturgy prays for "the multiplication of love" and quoted St Nicholas of Serbia, who said that "when love decreases in people, they feel the need to restore justice, but often they no longer know what it is".

An important Russian theologian and historian is the **protoierej Georgij Mitrofanov**, according to whom "priests today must help people not to lose their faith journey, regardless of whether they are in a war or peace zone, because in these circumstances it is easy to lose the Christian meaning of life".

Even those who are engaged in war, like the soldiers, Fr. Georgij recalls, "must not forget to be Christians, trying not to shed the blood of the enemy, not to become instruments of diabolical hatred". All wars are fratricidal, because all men are brothers: "The Cossacks who returned from the war were forbidden to set foot in church for a year, because they were covered in shame".

Archbishop Evstratij (Zorja) represents the autocephalous Ukrainian Church, and accuses Putin of "Jesuit thinking", which in the Russian world is synonymous with hypocrisy: because there are groups of exalted nationalists in Ukraine, then the whole country must be subjected to the "superior force", but Ukrainians are good people of faith, they do not want to participate in the restoration of "the empire of evil" and "never before have they needed the Church, they seek consolation and spiritual support, even just a word of hope, to be able to believe in the victory of

truth". Evstratij's hope is that in this task all the Churches of Ukraine can finally be united, driven by mercy towards the suffering people.

HRWF Research Notes

[Statement of the Ukrainian Association for Jewish Studies](#) (28.02.2022)

[Patriarch Kirill urges to pray for peace in "Russian Lands"](#) (28.02.2022)

[Head of Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia calls for "doubling prayers" for peace in Ukraine](#) (28.02.2022)

[Pope speaks with Ukrainian President](#) (27.02.2022)

[Does the Russian Orthodox Church want peace?](#) (26.02.2022)

[Patriarch Kirill calls on conflict parties in Ukraine to avoid civilian casualties](#) (25.02.2022)

[The Jewish community will strengthen charity during the conflict](#) (25.02.2022)

[Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church: Putin 'is destroying the basic principles of peace'](#)
(24.02.2022)

[Primate of the UOC MP - Putin: "War with Ukraine is a repetition of Cain's sin"](#) (24.02.2022)

[How Putin is exploiting Orthodox rivalries in Ukraine](#) (23.02.2022)

[23 February: Patriarch Kirill wished Putin 'peace of mind' on Defender of the Fatherland Day](#)
(23.02.2022)

[The head of the Assembly of Muslims called Russia's recognition of the Donbas' independence justified](#) (23.02.2022)

[The head of the canonical UOC supported Ukraine's territorial integrity](#) (19.02.2022)

The armed forces of Tatarstan approved the sentence of a Said Nursi Muslim

The real term assigned to Gabdrakhman Naumov under Art. 282.2 and 282.3 of the Criminal Code.

Sova Center (15.02.2022) - <https://bit.ly/3pk94m0> - On February 8, 2022, the Supreme Court of Tatarstan considered the verdict of Gabdrakhman (Albert) Naumov, accused of organizing the activities of the extremist organization "Nurjular" (Part 1 of Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code) and financing of extremism (Part 1 of Art. 282.3 of the Criminal Code), and left unchanged the

sentence of six and a half years in prison. The verdict [handed down](#) on November 2, 2021 by the Volga District Court of Kazan entered into force.

Naumov was a teacher at the Russian Islamic University, a member of the Ulema Council of the SAM of Russia, an imam-khatyib of the Al-Iman parish of the mukhtasibat of the Soviet and Volga regions of Kazan. In March 2020, he was accused of involvement in the activities of the banned religious association "Nurjular" and [detained](#).

According to the investigation, since 2015, Naumov "*organized the activities of secret groups*" and held "*secret propaganda meetings*" "Nurjular". In addition, from the point of view of the investigation with which the court agreed, in November 2015 he organized the project "Yashlar Bistase" ("Youth Sloboda") - Sunday courses on the basics of Islam for schoolchildren in the villages of Tatarstan. The investigation claimed that Naumov created this project, using other citizens, to increase the number of Nurjular followers in the republic and financed it through remittances: allocated money for transport, food and accommodation.

The verdict also mentions Naumov's connection with graduates of the Muhammadiya madrasah Nail Vakhitov and Salavat Muzaferov, who were [convicted](#) under Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code (Vakhitov received seven years in prison, Muzaferov - four years).

According to the lawyer, during the searches, Naumov was found two books by Said Nursi (alleged ideologist of "Nurjular"). However, according to the defender, the investigation did not provide evidence that Naumov preached a prohibited ideology. The lawyer also stated that witnesses, one of whom was classified, claimed Naumov's membership in Nurcular only from the words of others.

We consider the Nurjular [ban](#) illegal. His recognition as an extremist organization in 2008 was the result of unreasonable bans on the books of the Turkish Islamic theologian of the moderate direction Said Nursi - for promoting the superiority of Islam over other religions. Recall that the European Court of Human Rights in 2018 [ruled](#) that by banning these books, Russian courts violated Art. 10 of the European Convention guaranteeing freedom of expression. We believe that Russian Muslims studying Nursi's heritage do not constitute a single organization. Nevertheless, the Nurcular association is banned in Russia as an extremist organization, as a result of which Muslims reading and discussing Nursi's books are prosecuted.

Special Bimonthly FORB Digest (16–28.02.2022)

27.02.2022 - Jehovah's Witness deported to... Ukraine (!) after his release

Konstantin Bazhenov was deprived of his citizenship due to his criminal prosecution. See a [video](#) report and his testimony in Russian.

In 2021, one of the first Jehovah's Witnesses that was sent behind bars after the Russian Supreme Court decided to ban the organization was released from prison and deported from Russia.

As soon as Konstantin Bazhenov left the colony, he was detained and deported to Ukraine because his Russian citizenship was revoked due to criminal prosecution.

[Continue reading...](#)

25.02.2022 - Supporters of the "Crimean Alliance of Pagans" detained in Crimea

It is reported that the detained supporters of the "Right Sector" banned in the Russian Federation, as well as members of the radical neo-pagan community "Crimean Alliance of Pagans".

The detainees planned to blow up the church.

Components for the manufacture of an explosive device with damaging elements, explosives, as well as instructions for the manufacture of IEDs were found and confiscated at the places of residence and collection of them. In addition, the symbols of the "Right Sector", neo-pagan paraphernalia and literature of the recognized extremist organization "Jehovah's Witnesses" were confiscated.

One of the detainees confessed to purchasing and storing components, as well as plans to manufacture IEDs

[Continue reading...](#)

24.02.2022 - In Anapa, the court ruled to block the page of the church, which is part of the New Generation movement, on the social network

On February 20, 2022, it became known that the city court of Anapa satisfied the claim of the prosecutor's office to block the page of the city Church of Christ the Savior in VKontakte. The church belongs to the New Generation movement.

The administrative defendant was VKontakte LLC and its director Nikolai Bogoslavsky.

According to the prosecutor's office, a group of 200 users, in which announcements of divine services and Christian actions are published, creates a "*threat to the foundations of the constitutional order of the Russian Federation* . "

Let us recall that earlier the activities of four foreign organizations of the New Generation Church were recognized as undesirable on the territory of the Russian Federation.

[Continue reading...](#)

24.02.2022 - The former secretary of the Primate of the UOC-MP, and now the Metropolitan of the OCU, said that the Church blesses the use of weapons for the defense of the country

The Church blesses the use of weapons against invaders, as they are used for defensive purposes. This was stated on February 23 by the former secretary of the Primate of the UOC-MP (Ukrainian Orthodox Church / Moscow Patriarchate), and now Metropolitan of Pereyaslavl and Vishnevsky OCU (Orthodox Church of Ukraine) Oleksandr (Drabinko), writes Ukrinform.

[Continue reading...](#)

23.02.2022 - DONBAS: Luhansk: Religious freedom survey, February 2022

Freedom of religion and belief is severely restricted in the rebel Luhansk People's Republic occupying currently (February 2022) about a third of Ukraine's Luhansk Region. Forum 18's survey analysis documents violations including: rendering illegal all Protestant and non-Moscow Patriarchate Orthodox communities; a climate of fear about discussing human rights violations; repeated denials of permission to a Roman Catholic priest to live in the region; and increasing numbers of banned allegedly "extremist" books, including an edition of the Gospel of John published in 1820.

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

23.02.2022 - The head of the DSMR called Russia's recognition of the DPR and LPR justified

The decision to recognize the independence of the Donetsk People's Republic (DPR) and Luhansk People's Republic (LPR) by Russia is justified in order to protect people, and Russian Muslims reacted with understanding, Mufti Albir Krganov, a member of the Public Chamber of the Russian Federation, head of the Spiritual Assembly of Muslims of Russia (DSMR), told RIA Novosti.

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

23.02.2022 - Patriarch Kirill congratulated Putin on Defender of the Fatherland Day

Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia Kirill congratulated Russian President Vladimir Putin on Defender of the Fatherland Day and wished him peace of mind, health and God's help in his ministry, follows from a message published on the website of the Russian Orthodox Church. The national holiday - Defender of the Fatherland Day - is celebrated on February 23 in Russia .

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

23.02.2022 - How Putin is exploiting Orthodox rivalries in Ukraine

The Russian president says the government in Kiev is repressing the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, which is attached to the Moscow Patriarchate.

Putin added the religious tensions to the two countries' already explosive political situation on Monday during a televised address in which he acknowledged the independence of the pro-Russian separatist territories in eastern Ukraine.

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

22.02.2022 - CRIMEA: 23 fines under Russia's "anti-missionary" laws in 2021

All 23 of the administrative prosecutions against individuals under Russia's "anti-missionary" laws in 2021 in Russian-occupied Crimea led to convictions and fines. Assistant Prosecutor

Olga Kushnerova brought the case against Imam Said Akhmad Asadov, fined five days' average local wages for leading prayers in a Simferopol District mosque raided by Russian FSB security service officers and Prosecutor's Office officials. "I won't give any comments by phone," she told Forum 18. "Everything I did was within the parameters of the law and the duties assigned to me under the law." She refused to discuss why an individual should be punished for leading worship in a religious community.

[Continue reading...](#)

18.02.2022 - Ukrainian Jehovah's Witness sentenced for talking about the Bible in Russian-occupied Crimea

A Russian occupation court [has found](#) 32-year-old Artem Shabliy guilty of so-called 'participation in an extremist organization' for practising his faith as a Jehovah's Witness. In Russian occupied Crimea, it is the first time that a two-year suspended sentence has been passed, after four real sentences of six or six and a half years against four other Ukrainian believers.

[Continue reading...](#)

17.02.2022 - An Appeal in Kemerovo upheld Aleksandr Bondarchuk's and Sergey Yavushkin's sentence - Both Jehovah's Witnesses

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2022/02/170718.html>

On February 16, 2022, the Kemerovo Regional Court rejected the appeal of Aleksandr Bondarchuk and Sergey Yavushkin, leaving the sentence unchanged - 4 years of suspended imprisonment.

In the summer of 2021, the Zavodskoy District Court of Kemerovo found Bondarchuk and Yavushkin guilty of extremism. The prosecution presented prayers and the rental of a pool for the rite of Christian baptism as a "crime".

[Continue reading...](#)

15.02.2022 - The Supreme Court of Tatarstan approved the verdict against Gabdrakhman Naumov

The real term assigned to Gabdrakhman Naumov under Art. 282.2 and 282.3 of the Criminal Code.

On February 8, 2022, the Supreme Court of Tatarstan considered the verdict of Gabdrakhman (Albert) Naumov, accused of organizing the activities of the extremist organization "Nurjular" (Part 1 of Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code) and financing of extremism (Part 1 of Art. 282.3 of the Criminal Code), and left unchanged the sentence of six and a half years in prison. The verdict [handed down](#) on November 2, 2021 by the Volga District Court of Kazan entered into force.

[Continue reading...](#)

Jehovah's Witness Konstantin Bazhenov deported to... Ukraine (!) after his release

He was deprived of his citizenship due to his criminal prosecution. See a [video report](#) and his testimony in Russian.



Photo: Konstantin and Irina Bazhenov at the Russian-Ukrainian border (Credit: jw-russia.org)

In 2021, one of the first Jehovah's Witnesses that was sent behind bars after the Russian Supreme Court decided to ban the organization was released from prison and deported from Russia. His story is told in this four-minute video.

As soon as Konstantin Bazhenov left the colony, he was detained and deported to Ukraine because his Russian citizenship was revoked due to criminal prosecution.

It all began on June 12, 2018, when searches took place in Konstantin Bazhenov's apartment, as well as in 6 other dwellings of believers. After that, he was charged with extremism. As a result, Konstantin and five other believers were sent to the pre-trial detention center.

Konstantin Bazhenov: "The FSB, the investigator and the operatives promised me that if I plead guilty, I will start cooperating with them, they will guarantee me a suspended sentence, and that I will not go to prison." Konstantin refused to cooperate with the investigator, as this would mean giving up his faith. In total, Konstantin spent almost a year in a pre-trial detention center and waited for a court decision under a ban on certain actions for several more months. The investigation accused him of organizing the activities of an extremist organization.

Konstantin Bazhenov: "The main accusation was based on the fact that in the winter, in January 2018, we held a religious meeting. We read the Bible there, sang spiritual songs, discussed how to live according to biblical principles. The investigator interpreted this religious meeting as if we were holding a meeting of a legal entity banned in Russia."

On September 19, 2019, the judge announced the sentence: 3.5 years in a penal colony. Three months later, the Court of Appeal upheld this verdict and on February 4, 2020, Bazhenov was sent to a correctional colony.

Konstantin Bazhenov: "On February 8, 2020, I was brought to the correctional colony-3 in the city of Dimitrovgrad, Ulyanovsk Region. I worked at the prison store. I received a lot of letters. The operational officer called me and said: "Bazhenov, we receive 300 letters a year for the entire colony. You alone received more than 300 letters in a month." He says: "What are you doing? Do you want our inspector to drown in these letters?" Well, I explained that people want to support me, somehow encourage, encourage me.

Konstantin spent another 1 year and 3 months in the colony and was released on parole on May 5, 2021.

Konstantin Bazhenov: "It was a happy moment - I saw Irina, my wife, hugged her. The head of the detachment says: "Konstantin, I didn't expect so many people to be present! I knew that you have brothers and sisters, they write letters to you. But that so many people will come to meet you ... "He says:" Yes, you are a happy person!

When the day of the deportation came, Konstantin's fellow believers gathered to support him. Konstantin Bazhenov: "On May 19, we arrived at the border. They checked our documents, all issued. I was met by brothers and sisters with a poster, flowers. My dear wife, Irina, was present. And it was such a joy, such an unforgettable moment, how we saw each other, how we could hug. As Jehovah promised that he would provide a way out in trials - behold, he provided me with a way out. I left the colony, left the deportation center. Indeed, he pushed away all the barriers and made it possible for my wife and I to meet on the day of our wedding anniversary. Such a happy moment."

After his release, Konstantin and Irina Bazhenov live in Ukraine.

Over the past 4.5 years, 322 Jehovah's Witnesses have been imprisoned. As of February 2022, 65 believers are awaiting sentencing behind bars and another 18 are serving sentences in penal colonies. 8 Jehovah's Witnesses completed their sentences and were released from prison.

Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church: Putin is “destroying the basic principles of peace”

Patriarch Sviatoslav Shevchuk calls the Russian actions “a new wave of armed aggression.”

By Massimo Introvigne

Bitter Winter (24.02.2022) - <https://bit.ly/3tqto6v> - Yes, there are Roman Catholics in Ukraine. Quite a few of them. The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church has some 5 million members in a country of 44 million, and may have more than eight million parishioners if one adds the Ukrainian diaspora throughout the world. It is in full communion with the Pope but follows a different rite (Byzantine). In fact, after the Latin Church, the Ukrainian Church is the second largest within the global Catholic communion. While there is a small percentage of Latin Catholics (around 400,000) in Ukraine, the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church has traditionally been the voice of Catholicism in the country.

The [message of Patriarch Sviatoslav Shevchuk](#), the head of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, released on February 22, 2022, accordingly, is the most authorized and official comment by the Ukrainian Roman Catholic authorities on the current events. Although released

before the invasion, the statement already predicts it and spells out the Catholic answer to the aggression.

The Patriarch writes that “The recognition of the self-proclaimed Luhansk and Donetsk ‘People’s Republics’ as ‘independent and sovereign’ by the President of the Russian Federation seriously challenges and threatens the international community and international law. It inflicts irreparable damage to the very logic of interstate relations, which are designed to ensure peace and a just society, the rule of law, accountability, protection of human beings, their lives, and natural rights.” The problem, Shevchuk says, does not concern Ukraine only. “Today, all humanity is in danger that the right of the strong will impose itself on everyone, ignoring the rule of law.”

The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church does not believe that both parties are to blame for what happened. There is a party that aggressed and one that was aggressed. “By their decision, the Patriarch writes, the authorities of the Russian Federation unilaterally withdrew from the long peace process.” Instead, a “Russian armed aggression” continued. Indeed, the war started with the occupation of Crimea in 2014. “The war against our people, Shevchuk notes, in 2014 left deep wounds on the lives of many of our compatriots: thousands were killed, or left wounded and lonely.”

But now, according to the Patriarch, something even worse happened. “Yesterday’s step by the President of the Russian Federation destroyed the basic principles of the long process of restoring peace in Ukraine, created opportunities for a new wave of armed aggression against our state, and opened the door to a full-scale military operation against the Ukrainian people.”

Christianity is a religion of peace, the Patriarch explains, and the Church always tries to “prevent war,” but on the other hand Catholic moral theology allows for resistance against an unjust aggression. “Today, he writes, we consider the protection of our native land, our memory and hope, our God-given right to exist, to be a personal responsibility and a sacred duty of the citizens of Ukraine.

Defending the Motherland is our natural right and our civic duty. We are strong when we are together. Now is the time to unite our efforts to defend the independence, territorial integrity, and sovereignty of the Ukrainian State.” “We are a people who love peace. And that is why we are ready to defend it and fight for it strenuously.”

The crisis, the Patriarch believes, is international. “We are convinced, he writes, that the world cannot evolve and find answers to the challenges of our time by resorting to force and violence, neglecting universal values and Gospel truth. We call on all people of good will not to stand aside from the suffering of the Ukrainian people caused by the Russian military aggression.”

The Church wants peace, Shevchuk writes, but it should be a “just peace.” When injustice is vested on the country, the Catholic Church is with the “defenders of Ukraine, who these days are an example of sacrificial love and devotional service to our people. May the merciful Lord protect them from all dangers and endow their efforts with the ultimate victory of truth and goodness,” the Patriarch prays.

Photo: *The Cathedral of St. George in Lviv, Ukraine, the mother church of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church.* [Credits](#).

How Putin is exploiting Orthodox rivalries in Ukraine

The Russian president says the government in Kiev is repressing the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, which is attached to the Moscow Patriarchate



The Moscow Patriarchate wants to impose itself as the main force of Orthodoxy. (Photo by SADAK SOUICI / LE PICTORIUM/ MAXPPP)

By Marguerite de Lasa

La Croix International (23.02.2020) - <https://bit.ly/33QXAPI> - Russia's President Vladimir Putin has accused Ukraine's government of repressing the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, which is attached to the Patriarchate of Moscow.

Putin added the religious tensions to the two countries' already explosive political situation on Monday during a televised address in which he acknowledged the independence of the pro-Russian separatist territories in Eastern Ukraine.

"Kiev continues to prepare a crackdown against the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate," he claimed.

"The Ukrainian authorities have cynically turned the tragedy of the split in the Church into an instrument of state policy," the 69-year-old strong-arm leader said.

To support his indictment of Ukraine, Putin is exploiting Orthodox tensions in Ukraine, which pit hierarchs and common believers who wish to remain tethered to the Moscow Patriarchate and those who are part of autocephalous (independent) Church attached to the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople.

Recognition of a church in Ukraine independent of Moscow

The Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I granted autocephaly to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in 2019, thereby officializing its independence from the Russian Orthodox Church.

Up until then the 25 million Ukrainian Orthodox believers were canonically dependent on the Moscow Patriarchate.

"Patriarch Bartholomew has thus allowed Ukrainians to be fully Orthodox and fully Ukrainian, without wondering what their link to Moscow is," said Jean-François Colosimo, an Orthodox theologian and editor.

Faced with the autocephalous Church, the Patriarchate of Moscow wants to impose itself as the main force of Orthodoxy, relying on symbolic and material reasons.

"Moscow does not intend to give up its hold on Kiev, which is the place of baptism for all the Russians," Colosimo pointed out.

The first conversions to Orthodoxy from the Slavic world took place in Kiev in the 9th century.

"Ukraine is also a large part of the resources of the Patriarchate of Moscow, in terms of geography, as well as the number of priests and faithful," the theologian said.

"It is clear that in the current situation, the Kremlin considers the Patriarchate of Moscow as a diplomatic instrument," Colosimo noted.

Jivko Panev, another Orthodox theologian and journalist, said these tensions between the two Churches are above all ecclesial in nature.

"For the Ukrainian Church of the Patriarchate of Moscow, what is important is to remain in canonicality," said Panev, who is also the founder of the information website Orthodoxy.com.

Orthodox who've remained faithful to Moscow, an element of destabilization

The Ukrainian government favors the autocephalous Church and "tends to accuse the branch that has remained faithful to Moscow of being an element of destabilization for Ukraine," Colosimo said.

A survey conducted last July by the International Institute of Sociology in Kiev found that 58% of Ukrainians who are Orthodox say they belong to the autocephalous Church, while about 25% identify with the Church attached to the Patriarchate of Moscow.

But that is not the whole story.

"It is possible that there are Ukrainian Orthodox faithful to Moscow, who at the same time feel very patriotic," claimed Colosimo.

Such is the case with Bishop Victor Kotsaba of Barychivka who is currently the administrator of the Moscow-linked Eparchy of Kiev.

"The Ukrainian Orthodox Church supports our government, our president and all the leaders who currently have a great responsibility," he said on February 16.

He added that his Russian-affiliated Church was ready, "in case of a total war, to bless the people in the defense of (their) homeland" in Ukraine.

Read more at: <https://international.la-croix.com/news/religion/how-putin-is-exploiting-orthodox-rivalries-in-ukraine/15685>

The head of the Assembly of Muslims called Russia's recognition of the Donbas' independence justified

Human Rights Without Frontiers in Brussels calls upon the US, the EU and the UK authorities to deny the access to their territory to Mufti Albir Krganov, Head of the Spiritual Assembly of Muslims of Russia (DSMR). The Mufti also justified "Russia's recognition of Crimea" in the name of "saving lives" (!) but he is keeping silent about the lives of Ukrainians attacked today by the Russian army

RIA Novosti (23.02.2022) – <https://bit.ly/3vkv2Jr> - "Russia's decision to recognize the independence of the Donetsk People's Republic and Luhansk People's Republic is justified to protect people, and Russian Muslims understand it," Mufti Albir Krganov, a member of the Public Chamber of the Russian Federation, head of the Spiritual Assembly of Muslims of Russia (DSMR), told RIA Novosti.

"I believe that the decision to recognize the republics of the DPR and LPR is justified. Russia's position, recognition of republics - not for someone to suffer, on the contrary, so that people do not die in Donbass. As stated in the Quran, who will save the life of one person will save the whole world, and if he kills one, as if all mankind," Krganov said.

According to him, if the negotiations do not work, "you need to make decisions, because people are waiting. Perhaps it was not an easy decision for the head of state, but, given the opinion of society, specialists, the Security Council, he accepted it. And as members of the 'open' Security Council said, this is a forced decision. Muslims are not a separate part of Russian civil society.

People see and understand what is happening in Donbass. And Russian Muslims understand the recognition of the independence of the DPR and LPR," the mufti stressed.

He recalled that earlier it was Russia's recognition of Crimea that "allowed to save the people of the republic. I saw bandits threatening believers in Crimea, accusing Orthodox and Muslims. These people headed the national Tatar organization, sat 100 meters from the mosque. Pseudo-Islamic organizations, which are now banned in Russia, were imprisoned to start interethnic, interreligious discord in Crimea. Thank God that we were then able to recognize Crimea as a decision, to save the people of the republic," concluded the agency's interlocutor.

The situation in Donbass has escalated in recent days, the **Donetsk and Lugansk People's Republics** announced a lot of shelling by Ukrainian security forces. The leadership of the DPR and LPR reported on the temporary evacuation of citizens to the Rostov region in connection with the threat of Ukraine's invasion. First of all, evacuation concerns women, children and the elderly. The head of the **DPR Denis Pushilin** said that Ukrainian **President Volodymyr Zelenskyy** may soon order the military to move on an offensive, implement a plan to invade the DPR and LPR. On Saturday, February 19, the leaders of the DPR and LPR signed decrees on general mobilization, and then appealed to Russia to recognize the independence of the republics.

Russian **President Vladimir Putin** on Monday, after a meeting of the Security Council, addressed the citizens of the Russian Federation and said that he considers it necessary to immediately recognize the sovereignty of the Donetsk and Lugansk People's Republics. He noted that the world prefers not to notice the horror and genocide in Donbass, not a single day without shelling, killings of civilians and blockade do not stop. As the president said, in case of further bloodshed in Donbass, all responsibility will be on the Kiev regime. Immediately after the address, the president in the Kremlin signed decrees recognizing the LPR and **DPR**. In his decrees, Putin instructed to ensure the maintenance of peace in the DPR and LPR by the armed forces of the Russian Federation.

HRWF Note: Click to the automatic translation for links to websites in Russian

*Photo: Head of the Spiritual Assembly of Muslims of Russia (DSMR) Mufti Albir Krganov.
Archive photo: Read ria.ru in*

23 February: Patriarch Kirill wished Putin peace of mind on Defender of the Fatherland Day

***Human Rights Without Frontiers* in Brussels calls upon the US, the EU and the UK authorities to deny the access to their territory to Patriarch Kirill and the clergy of the Russian Orthodox Church**

HRWF/ RIA NOVOSTI (24.02.2022) - <https://bit.ly/3HcCGHP> - On 23 February, Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia congratulated Russian President Vladimir Putin on Defender of the Fatherland Day and wished him peace of mind, health and God's help in his ministry, according to the message published on the website of the Russian Orthodox Church:

"I cordially congratulate you on Defender of the Fatherland Day. <...> I wish you good health, peace of mind and abundant help from the Lord in your high and responsible service to the people of Russia," Patriarch Kirill wrote.

He noted that with the "active participation and support" of the president, "many important temple-building, educational and social projects of the [Moscow Patriarchate](#) are being implemented, church-state cooperation aimed at preserving national historical memory and affirming the principles of traditional morality in the lives of contemporaries is developing fruitfully."

According to him, [the Russian Orthodox Church](#) makes a significant contribution to the patriotic education of compatriots. "Now we honor the feat of those who carry out responsible military service, guard the borders of their native country and take care of strengthening its defense capability and national security. Valor and courage, courage and determination, ardent love for the Fatherland and readiness for self-sacrifice - these qualities have distinguished our people for centuries, who have passed through the crucible of many trials and tempered their character and strength of spirit in them," Patriarch Kirill emphasized.

The Primate also congratulated [Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu and Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin on holiday](#), the relevant reports were published on the ROC website. In his address to Mishustin, the patriarch noted that the Russian Church gratefully remembers the feats of their ancestors and prays for them. "By praying for the repose of all leaders and soldiers who were killed on the battlefields," the Russian Orthodox Church calls for God's blessing on all those who now guard the independence of the Fatherland and work for the benefit of their native land," [the patriarch concluded](#).

Putin said no one will be able to destroy traditional Russian values

Today, 24 February, President Putin declared to Interfax "No one will be able to destroy traditional Russian values and replace them with attitudes that would corrode the people of Russia from the inside."

"Until recently, attempts haven't stopped to use us to their advantage, to destroy our traditional values and impose their pseudo-values on us, which would corrode our people from the inside, those attitudes that they are already aggressively planting in their countries and which directly lead to degradation and degeneration, since they contradict the very nature of man," Putin said in a video message to the Russians.

"This is not going to happen. This has never worked out for anyone. It won't work now either," he added.

Earlier on Thursday, Putin announced a special military operation in connection with the situation in Donbas. Source: [Interfax](#)

Lavrov called what's happening in eastern Ukraine an attack on Orthodoxy and the "Russian World"

The latest statements of Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov are a source of serious concerns about the defence of the "Russian world" and the future of neighboring countries having Russian-speaking minorities within their borders.

On 21 February, Minister Lavrov said he saw no other option but for Russia to recognize the Donbas self-proclaimed republics.

« Thus, we will send a powerful signal to the Russian world. Throughout these eight years, we have not been looking indifferently at how our compatriots, our citizens have been mistreated. That's why I do not see any other option, » Lavrov said at a special meeting of the Russian Security Council on Monday.

« All arguments » in favor of adopting a decision to recognize the independence of the Donbas self-proclaimed republics have been put forth at the Russian Security Council's meeting, he said.

« I also see here an aspect such as the term 'genocide', which you mentioned at the press conference with [German Chancellor] Olaf Scholz. The fact that they are now trying to support this blatantly neo-Nazi, Bandera regime in Kyiv is a manifestation of genocide, » Minister Lavrov said.

Slavic people, Orthodox people, « everything that is Russian » are under attack in Ukraine, he said.

Putin accusing Kiev of persecuting the Ukrainian Church of Moscow Patriarchate

On the same day (21 February), President Putin "announced" in an address to the Russian nation that Kiev was planning to crack down on the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate.

"The Ukrainian authorities have cynically turned the tragedy of the church split into an instrument of state policy. The current leadership of the country does not respond to the requests of the Ukrainian citizens to repeal the laws that infringe on the rights of believers," he went on to say.

"Moreover, new bills directed against the clergy and millions of parishioners of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate have been registered in the Rada," Putin said.

HRWF Note: Click to the automatic translation for links to websites in Russian

Two judgments in favour of 14 Jehovah's Witnesses against Russia

By Willy Fautré, Human Rights Without Frontiers

The European Magazine (23.02.2022) - <https://bit.ly/3I9vWMe> - On 22 February, the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) issued two judgments in favor of 14 Jehovah's Witnesses and found that Russia violated their fundamental rights to freedom of religion. Russia has been ordered to pay a total of over 99,000 euros (\$112,323 U.S.) in compensation for violations that included mistreatment at the hands of law enforcement officials between 2010 and 2012.

Jarrod Lopes, spokesman for Jehovah's Witnesses, states:

“These judgments set a critical precedent that Russia has been unjustly and unlawfully raiding the homes of Jehovah’s Witnesses—1,700 since the 2017. Any new home raids based solely on the owner’s religious beliefs are now considered illegal and in violation of the European Convention.”

“Additionally, the disruption of Ms. Zharinova’s door-to-door preaching, followed by her detention and seizure of religious literature amounted to an ‘interference by a public authority’ with her right to manifest her religion. This is a clear endorsement by the ECHR that ‘door-to-door preaching’ is a religious activity that a public authority should not interfere with. Today the ECHR sent a clear signal to Russia of what to expect when the Court deals with the over 60 other cases pending involving Jehovah’s Witnesses. Jehovah’s Witnesses around the world rejoice to see that their fellow believers in Russia are being validated and protected by the ECHR for staying true to their religious beliefs.”

The Court’s two judgments address six cases against Russia that challenged the validity of search warrants that prompted raids of several private homes and a place of worship, strip searches of two women following their arrest while preaching, the confiscation of personal items, and the refusal of authorities to return seized personal items. In some cases, searches were carried out by fully masked and heavily armed FSB (Russian secret police) officers who forcefully confronted peaceful citizens solely on the basis of their Christian beliefs.

The judgements were rendered by a committee of three judges, which cannot be referred to the Grand Chamber and are therefore final judgments. The Council of Europe’s Committee of Ministers will monitor whether Russia implements the judgments.

Case of Cheprunov and Others v. Russia (Applications nos. 74320/10)

- “1. The case concerns searches in the flats of Jehovah’s Witnesses and in the prayer hall owned by a local religious organisation of Jehovah’s Witnesses.
2. The applicants are individual Jehovah’s Witnesses and the Kostomuksha local religious organisation of Jehovah’s Witnesses (the “Kostomuksha LRO”). On various dates between 2010 and 2012, the Russian courts authorised searches and inspections in the applicants’ flats on the basis that, as Jehovah’s Witnesses, they might be involved in extremist activities and distribution of extremist literature. The Federal Security Service (the “FSB”) also issued an inspection order for the prayer hall owned by the Kostomuksha LRO.
3. The authorities searched the applicants’ flats and seized the religious literature they had found, including Bibles, magazines and books, and other personal items, such as computers, video-recordings, writing pads and notebooks. Domestic courts dismissed the applicants’ complaints about the searches, finding that they had been duly authorised by judicial decisions and carried out in accordance with the law (see the Appendix).
4. Following an inspection in her flat and seizure of religious brochures, Ms Chavychalova (application no. 74329/10) was found guilty of “unlawful possession of extremist material with the aim of mass distributing”, an offence under Article 20.29 of the Code of Administrative Offences (CAO), and fined 1,500 Russian roubles.
5. The applicants complained that the searches in their flats and seizure of their religious literature and personal belongings were neither lawful, nor “necessary in a democratic society”, and thus, violated their rights guaranteed by the Articles 8, 9, 10, and 14 of the Convention. Some of the applicants also relied on Articles 6, 11 and 13 of the Convention, and Article 1 of Protocol No. 1 in this respect.” (Source: European Court decision)

The Court unanimously held that there has been a violation of Article 9 (freedom of religion or belief) of the European Convention and that Russia has to pay

1. EUR 37 to Ms Chavychalova, and EUR 500 (five hundred euros) jointly to Ms Zharikova and Mr Naumov, plus any tax that may be chargeable, in respect of pecuniary damage;
2. EUR 5,000 (five thousand euros) jointly to all the applicants in respect of costs and expenses.

Case of Zharinova v. Russia (Application no. 17715/12)

“1. The case concerns the apprehension of the applicant, a Jehovah’s Witness, while preaching door-to-door, her subsequent conveyance to the police station, where she was questioned, searched, and had her religious literature seized.

2. On 17 March 2011 the applicant was preaching door-to-door and talking about the Bible with local residents in her home town. She was approached by two police officers who, after checking her identity documents, took her to a police station. While at the station, the officers photocopied her passport and interviewed her for two hours. They also seized her personal belongings and religious literature. After four and a half hours, she was released.

3. The applicant complained to a court of her unlawful detention and seizure of her possessions. By judgment of 19 August 2011, as upheld on appeal on 20 September 2011, the Ivaneyevka Town Court in the Moscow Region dismissed the complaint, finding that the police had lawfully sought to uncover an administrative offence and stop her unlawful activities.

4. Relying on Articles 9 and 10, taken alone and in conjunction with Article 14, and on Articles 3 and 5 of the Convention, the applicant complains of the disruption of her religious activity, followed by her detention at the police station, and the seizure of her personal belongings.”
(Source: European Court decision)

The Court unanimously held that there has been a violation of Article 9 (freedom of religion or belief) of the European Convention and that Russia has to pay

1. EUR 10,000 (ten thousand euros), plus any tax that may be chargeable, in respect of non-pecuniary damage;
 2. EUR 1,000 (one thousand euros), plus any tax that may be chargeable to the applicant, in respect of costs and expenses.
-

Special Bimonthly FORB Digest (01–15.02.2022)

15.02.2022 - A Cherkessk appeals court confirmed the sentence of a woman with a disability for practicing her faith

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2022/02/151707.html>

On February 15, 2022, the Supreme Court of the Karachay-Cherkess Republic upheld the five-year suspended sentence of Yelena Menchikova.

In December 2021, the court of first instance found the believer guilty of participating in the activities of an extremist organization and involving other persons in it, considering it a crime that Yelena Menchikova discussed the Bible with others, including at religious meetings of Jehovah's Witnesses.

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

15.02.2022 - Mass Searches of Jehovah's Witnesses Took Place in Kuban. At Least One Believer Was Sent to Jail

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2022/02/151600.html>

On Sunday morning, 13 February 2022, at least 25 homes of Jehovah's Witnesses were raided in the villages of Vyselki and Berezanskaya in Krasnodar Territory. Another search took place in Novorossiysk. According to preliminary information, a criminal case was opened against three men — Valeriy Vichkayev, Vitaliy Ushakov and Yevgeniy Bochko.

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

15.02.2022 - An appeal court upheld the verdict of an 80-year-old widow from Seversk: a four-year suspended sentence for reading the Bible

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2022/02/150931.html>

On February 14, 2022, the Tomsk Regional Court approved the sentence for teacher Yelena Saveliyeva: 4 years of suspended sentence for practicing her religion.

Addressing the panel of judges, the believer emphasized the absurdity of her sentence: "My faith teaches me not to kill, not to deceive, not to be a vile person, not to wish harm to my neighbor, not to envy, to be kind and compassionate, to be a humble and conscientious person, to see in everyone good, wish your neighbor all the best, help, love and enjoy life."

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

11.01.2022 - A Chuvashia Court fined three Jehovah's Witnesses for talking about God

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2022/02/110948.html>

On February 10, 2022, Sergey Orlov, judge of the Kalininsky District Court of Cheboksary, found three local Jehovah's Witnesses guilty of extremism. Vladimir Dutkin was sentenced to a fine of 500,000 rubles, while Valeriy Yakovlev and Vladimir Chesnokov were fined 400,000 rubles.

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

09.02.2022 - Putin hears from head of Supreme Court about ruling favorable to Jehovah's Witnesses

Link to full text in Russian: http://rapsinews.ru/judicial_news/20220209/307714165.html

Actions consisting exclusively of exercising the right to freedom of conscience and freedom of religious confession cannot be considered to be extremist, declared the chairman of the Russian Supreme Court, Viacheslav Lebedev.

"Actions that do not contain indicators of extremism and consisting exclusively of exercising the right to freedom of conscience and freedom of religious confession, including by means of performance of religious rituals and ceremonies, do not constitute elements of a crime," Lebedev said during a conference of judges of the Russian Federation.

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

09.02.2022 - A secondary appeal in Novosibirsk upheld an imprisonment term for 68-year-old Yuriy Saveliyev

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2022/02/091403.html>

On February 7, 2022 Novosibirsk Regional Court upheld the sentence of Leninsky District Court of Novosibirsk against Yuriy Saveliyev — 6 years in a general regime colony and 1 year of restricted freedom for believing in God.

As an additional punishment, the court deprived the believer of the right to engage in activities related to administration and participation in public and religious organizations for a period of three years.

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

09.02.2022 - The court in Volgograd confirmed the verdict of Tablighi Jamaat's follower

On February 8, 2022, the Volgograd Regional Court confirmed the verdict of 51-year-old local resident Mikhail Kolotilin under Part 1 of Art. 282.2 Criminal Code (organization of activities of a prohibited organization).

In December 2021, the Soviet District Court of Volgograd sentenced Kolotilin to three years in prison in a general regime colony, finding him guilty of involvement in the Tablighi Jamaat movement banned in Russia. He was also sentenced to an additional punishment in the form of a five-year ban on educational activities.

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

06.02.2022 - Kremlin behind Moscow patriarchate's crackdown on dissident churchmen and movement – OpEd

The Kremlin is behind the Moscow Patriarchate's crackdown on dissidents among the clergy and among Orthodox social movements, Aleksey Makarkin says; but the Russian Church in some cases has gone ever further than the State because it fears that the State will begin to use its organs against the Church and undermine popular support for the faith.

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

04.02.2022 - Arrested, convicted, served time and deported. What is occurring with Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia based on Konstantin Bazhenov's experience

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2022/02/041224.html>

In 2021, one of the first Jehovah's Witnesses that was sent behind bars after the Russian Supreme Court decided to ban the organization was released from prison and deported from Russia. His story is told in a four-minute video.

As soon as Konstantin Bazhenov left the colony, he was detained and deported to Ukraine because his Russian citizenship was revoked due to criminal prosecution.

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

04.02.2022 - Another search in Kemerovo. A criminal case is initiated against a 58-year-old witness of Jehovah

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2022/02/041420.html>

In the early morning of February 3, 2022, a search was conducted at the home of a Kemerovo resident Vladimir Baikalov. A day earlier, a criminal case was initiated against him on charges of participation in the activities of an extremist organization.

A criminal case under Part 2 of Article 282.2 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation against Baykalov was initiated by Aleksandra Isaeva, senior investigator of the investigative department for the Zavodskoy district of the city of Kemerovo.

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

03.02.2022 - Ussuriysk-based Sergey Melnikov sentenced to three years of probation for being a Jehovah's Witness

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2022/02/031411.html>

On February 3, 2022, Dmitriy Babushkin, a judge of the Ussuriysky District Court of the Primorsky Territory, found Sergey Melnikov guilty of participating in the activities of an

extremist organization and gave him a suspended sentence of 3 years. The believer can appeal the verdict.

On June 5, 2019, Sergey Melnikov was detained in his own car while talking with Konstantin Belousov, who, as it turned out later, collaborated with the FSB.

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

02.02.2022 - A Krasnoyarsk court sentenced Anatoliy Gorbunov to a six-year prison term for discussing the Bible with fellow believers

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2022/02/021055.html>

On February 2, 2022, Mariya Kunik, judge of the Oktyabrsky District Court of Krasnoyarsk, found 64-year-old Anatoliy Gorbunov guilty of extremism and sentenced him to 6 years in a penal colony. The believer is taken into custody.

In Soviet times, Anatoly Gorbunov's father and grandfather were declared "enemies of the people" and exiled to Siberia. In 1993 they were rehabilitated.

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

Seven Jehovah's Witnesses sentenced to prison terms since 1 January

Three Jehovah's Witnesses sentenced to six years in prison in two weeks; 76 are in prison in all

HRWF (14.02.2022) – The persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses goes on unabated in Russia. Five of them were sentenced to prison terms in January and two more in the first half of February.

Jehovah's Witnesses sentenced to prison terms in Russia in 2022 (Update)

07 February 2022: Yuriy Saveliyev, 68 years (6 years + 1 year of restricted freedom)

02 February 2022: Anatoliy Gorbunov, 64 years (6 years)

25 January 2022: Anna Safronova, 57 years (6 years)

20 January 2022: Yevgeny Korotun, 52 years old (7 years + 2 years of restricted freedom)

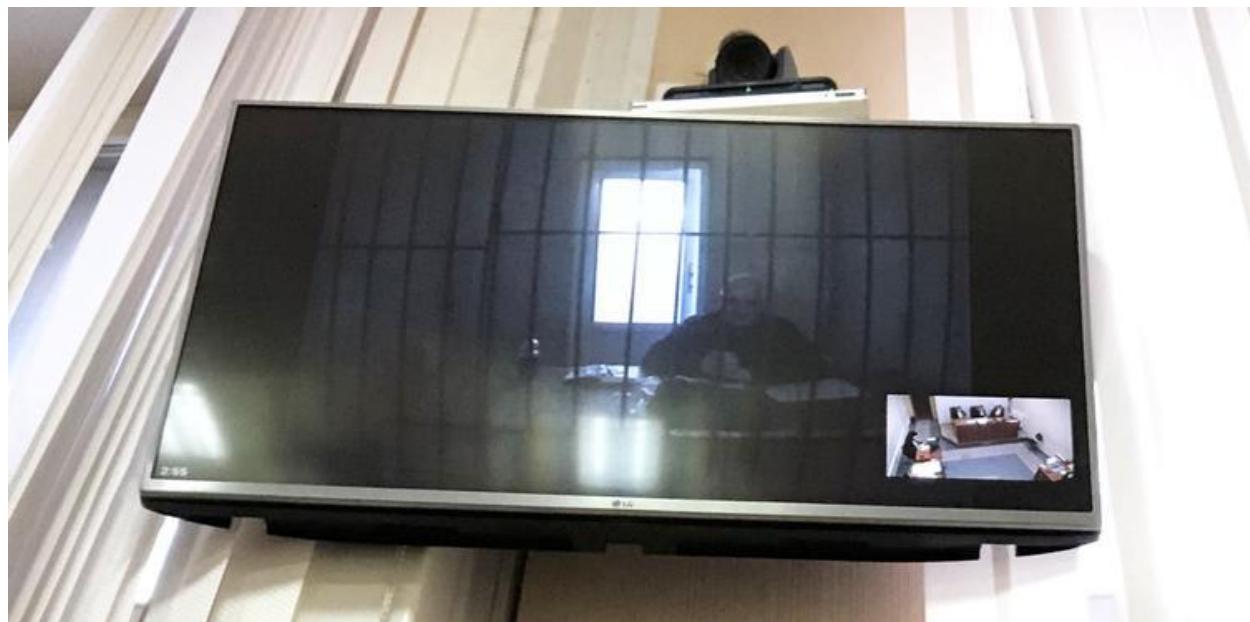
20 January 2022: Andrei Kolesnichenko, 52 years old (4 years + 1 year of restricted freedom)

19 January 2022: Alexei Ershov, 68 years old (3 years)

17 January 2022: Maksim Beltikov, 42 years old (2 years)



A six-year imprisonment term for 68-year-old Jehovah's Witness Yuriy Saveliyev upheld on appeal in Novosibirsk



In the photo: Yuriy Saveliyev on the monitor from the pre-trial detention center during the appeal Court (Credit: JW-Russia.org)

JW-Russia.org (09.02.2022) - <https://www.jw-russia.org/news/2022/02/091403.html> - On February 7, 2022 Novosibirsk Regional Court upheld the sentence of Leninsky District Court of Novosibirsk against Yuriy Saveliyev — [6 years in a general regime colony](#) and 1 year of restricted freedom for believing in God.

As an additional punishment, the court deprived the believer of the right to engage in activities related to administration and participation in public and religious organizations for a period of three years.

Saveliyev called the charges against him trumped up and called himself a victim. He stated: "I lost my health, I lost my property, my reputation suffered, and now I bear the shameful mark of a '*criminal*'. He can appeal the verdict in cassation and international structures.

An appellate court in a different composition reconsidered the verdict to the believer after the Eighth Court of Cassation of General jurisdiction [returned](#) the case to the appellate stage on November 24, 2021.

After his arrest, Yuriy Saveliyev has been behind bars for more than three years. In the colony, where the believer was sent after his conviction, there were attempts to force him to undergo treatment without grounds — in the summer of 2021 Yuriy was sent to Barnaul to a medical correctional facility specializing in the treatment of prisoners with alcoholism and drug addiction, although he does not suffer from either of these diseases. Saveliyev was repeatedly forced to sign a consent to medical procedures. In Correctional Colony No. 1 in the Altai Territory, photos of Yuriy with the caption "prone to extremism" were hung above his bed. The elderly believer should be released in August 2023.

The criminal prosecution of Russian Jehovah's Witnesses was condemned by [the Council of Europe](#), [the OSCE](#), [the European Union](#) and [many other](#) Russian and international organizations. [A Russian Supreme Court Plenum](#) clarification of June 28, 2011, states that joint

worship does not by itself constitute a crime under Article 282.2 of the Russian Criminal Code, which the security services use as a reason to persecute Jehovah's Witnesses.

A Krasnoyarsk court sentenced Jehovah's Witness Anatoliy Gorbunov to a six-year prison term for discussing the Bible with fellow believers



In the photo: Anatoly Gorbunov on the day of the verdict near the Oktyabrsky District Court (Credit: JW-Russia.org)

JW-Russia.org (02.02.2022) - <https://www.jw-russia.org/news/2022/02/021055.html> - On February 2, 2022, Mariya Kunik, judge of the Oktyabrsky District Court of Krasnoyarsk, found 64-year-old Anatoliy Gorbunov guilty of extremism and sentenced him to 6 years in a penal colony. The believer is taken into custody.

In Soviet times, Anatoly Gorbunov's father and grandfather were declared "enemies of the people" and exiled to Siberia. In 1993 they were rehabilitated. Now Anatoly was subjected to groundless repressions for his beliefs. In November 2018, he was searched, accompanied by pressure and threats. 17 months later, a criminal case was opened against Gorbunov. According to investigators, the believer organized discussions with fellow believers of the Christian way of life. This allegedly was the organization of the activities of a banned religious organization (part 1 of article 282.2 of the Criminal Code of Russia).

The court hearings continued for more than a year. In anticipation of the verdict, the believer spent more than 13 months on bail.

During the hearings in court, not a single fact was presented that would prove Gorbunov's guilt in real crimes. Among the materials of the case are 7 discs with records of religious meetings and Bible discussions. No calls for violence, inciting hatred or other illegal actions were recorded on them. The secret witness "Salov", whose testimony, according to the prosecution, was supposed to prove the guilt of the defendant, admitted that he saw Anatoliy only once and did not hear anything extremist from him. There are no victims in the case. Despite this, the prosecutor asked to send Anatoliy to a colony for 8 years.

The believer insists on his complete innocence. In court, Anatoliy drew attention to the fact that the Supreme Court [did not prohibit](#) Jehovah's Witnesses from practicing their faith, this right is enshrined in the Russian Constitution.

In the Krasnoyarsk Territory, [25 Jehovah's Witnesses](#) have already been subjected to criminal prosecution. Five of them were sentenced to various punishments: 2 were sentenced to 6 years in prison, 1 was fined, 2 received suspended sentences.

For the first time in Russia, a court sentenced a woman to a six-year prison term for adhering to the movement of Jehovah's Witnesses



Anna Safronova (Credit: JW-Russia.org)

JW-Russia.org (26.01.2022) - <https://www.jw-russia.org/news/2022/01/260838.html> - On January 25, 2022, Aleksandr Lepsky, a judge of the Trusovskiy District Court of Astrakhan, considered Anna Safronova's participation in Bible discussions extremism and sentenced her to 6 years in a penal colony, as requested by the prosecutor. After the verdict was announced, the believer was taken into custody.

In her last speech, Safronova said: "A conscience taught by the Bible does not allow me to harm the state and the people living in it. I have nothing to do with extremism. I am actually accused of believing in Jehovah God, praying to him, talking to others about the Bible and remaining a Jehovah's Witness, that is, enjoying the right guaranteed by Article 28 of the Constitution." As in other "extremist" cases against Jehovah's Witnesses, in Safronova's case there are no victims or damage caused to anyone or anything. The verdict has not entered into force and can be appealed.

Anna Safronova is a 56-year-old widow. She takes care of her mother, who is already over 80. The women had to go through searches twice. The first one took place in the summer of 2020, when a raid took place in the homes of 26 more families of believers. Then Anna was a witness in the [case](#) of other Astrakhan believers accused of extremism. A year later, Anna and her mother's apartment was searched again. This time, Safronova was already a suspect. She was interrogated and sent to the detention center for 1 day.

On May 28, 2021, the investigator for especially important cases of the Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation for the Astrakhan Region, Nikolay Banko, opened a criminal case against Anna Safronova under Part 2 of Art. 282.2 and part 1 of Art. 282.3 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation, accusing her of participating in worship services of Jehovah's Witnesses and financing extremist activities. Among the evidence of Anna's "criminal intent" is a discussion of the Bible with fellow believers via video link and the singing of songs and prayers to Jehovah God. The investigation considers the financing of extremism to be the fact that Safronova helped collect voluntary donations for the common needs of believers. For example, to pay for the ZOOM program, video cameras and microphones to communicate with fellow believers. Almost immediately after the initiation of the criminal case, Anna was included in the list of extremists of Rosfinmonitoring, due to which her bank accounts were blocked.

Anna Safronova became the first woman, Jehovah's Witness, in Russia to be sentenced to such a long prison term. In addition to her, after the guilty verdict, two more believers are currently behind bars: Olga Ivanova from Astrakhan (sentence - 3.5 years) and Valentina Baranovskaya from Abakan (2 years). In addition, Olga Ponomareva and Anna Yermak from the Krasnodar village of Kholmskaya were sentenced in absentia to 5 and 4.5 years in prison, respectively. Another woman, Tatyana Velizhanina from Sochi, is awaiting a court decision in a pre-trial detention center.

According to the [decision](#) of the Plenum of the Supreme Court of October 28, 2021, "the divine services of Jehovah's Witnesses, their joint performance of rites and ceremonies, in themselves do not constitute a crime under Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation, despite the liquidation of their legal entities.

Special Bimonthly FORB Digest (16–31.01.2022)

31.01.2022 - A Primorye court sentenced two Jehovah's Witnesses to a five-year suspended sentence for discussions about God

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2022/01/311556.html>

On January 31, 2021, Judge of the Pozharsky District Court of Primorsky Territory Yevgeniy Stefanyuk found 66-year-old Sergey Sergeyev and 57-year-old Yuriy Belosludtsev from Luchegorsk guilty of extremism for talking about God and sentenced both to a suspended sentence of 5 years.

Sergey Sergeyev said before the verdict: "I have never had a desire to harm someone ... I am accused of committing a serious crime, not because I did something bad or harmed someone, but because I am one of Jehovah's Witnesses."

[Continue reading...](#)

31.01.2022 - Five Sakhalin-based believers received suspended sentences ranging from two to six-and-a-half years for reading the Bible

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2022/01/311528.html>

On January 31, 2022 Judge Nikita Kucherov of the Nevelsk City Court of Sakhalin Region found local Jehovah's Witnesses guilty of participating in the activities of an extremist organization or in its organization. Sergey Kulakov and Yevgeniy Yelin were sentenced to 6.5 years of suspended imprisonment based on the more grave part of the article.

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

28.01.2022 - RUSSIA: Three acquitted on "extremism" charges but jailings continue

An appeal court has overturned the suspended sentences handed to three Jehovah's Witnesses. "We hope that the Kamchatka example will turn out to have an effect on other judges, and they will take the liberty of correcting the mistakes made by their colleagues," said Jehovah's Witness Yaroslav Sivulsky. The acquittals may be linked to Supreme Court amendments governing the implementation of "extremism" laws. Yet prosecutions continue. On 25 January, an Astrakhan court handed Anna Safronova the longest prison sentence yet given to a Jehovah's Witness woman – six years. The Justice Ministry did not answer as to whether Russia had become a safer country as a consequence of the prosecution of Jehovah's Witnesses and Muslim Nursi readers.

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

27.01.2022 - Judge applies Supreme Court ruling in Jehovah's Witnesses' favor

On 20 January 2022, the Pechora city court of the republic of Komi returned to the Pechora district prosecutor's office a case of Jehovah's Witnesses from Pechora who are accused on the basis of article 282.2 of the Criminal Code (arranging the activity of an extremist organization or membership in it). Believers report the return to the prosecutor of the case of "all seven" defendants, but the case file at the website of the court mentions nine defendants.

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

27.01.2022 - Thousands of Jehovah's Witnesses were among the millions victims of nazism

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2022/01/271353.html>

On January 27, the world observes the International Holocaust Remembrance Day, a symbolic date to commemorate the victims of Nazism. Murderous Nazi terror targeted millions for reasons of biology, nationality, or political ideology. Few people recognize that the Nazis' victims included thousands of Jehovah's Witnesses, who suffered for their Christian faith.

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

26.01.2022 - Case filed in Dagestan against alleged follower of Turkish theologian Said Nursi

On January 26, 2021, it became known that the Investigation Department of the RF Investigative Committee for the Republic of Dagestan opened a criminal case under Part 2 of Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code (participation in the activities of an extremist organization) against a resident of the city of Izberbash.

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

26.01.2022 - For the first time in Russia, a Court sentenced a woman to a six-year prison sentence for adhering to beliefs of Jehovah's Witnesses

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2022/01/260838.html>

On January 25, 2022, Aleksandr Lepsky, a judge of the Trusovskiy District Court of Astrakhan, considered Anna Safronova's participation in Bible discussions extremism and sentenced her to 6 years in a penal colony, as requested by the prosecutor. After the verdict was announced, the believer was taken into custody.

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

22.01.2022 - RUSSIA: Aleksei Yershov is already the second Jehovah's Witness to be sent behind bars in 2022

A court in Seversk sentenced this 68-year old Jehovah's Witness to three years in a penal colony. A week ago, Maksim Nikolayevich Beltikov was sentenced to two years in prison

On 19 January 2022, Judge of the Seversky City Court of the Tomsk Region Yalchin Badalov found 68-year-old Jehovah's Witness Alexei Ershov guilty of participating in "extremist activities" (Part 2 of Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code) and sentenced him to three years in a penal colony. The convict was taken into custody in the courtroom, reports the correspondent of the Portal "Credo.Press" with reference to sources among Russian Jehovah's Witnesses.

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

21.01.2022 - RUSSIA: Suspended sentences and fines – list

Courts across Russia have jailed on "extremism"-related criminal charges many Jehovah's Witnesses and Muslims who read the works of the Turkish theologian Said Nursi. Courts have punished still more with suspended sentences or fines. Nearly 100 Jehovah's Witnesses are now on probation after receiving suspended sentences, as well as one Muslim Nursi reader. Jehovah's Witnesses serving suspended sentences have described the consequences, including being unable to see relatives living in other regions, and finding it impossible to secure jobs. A total of 20 Jehovah's Witnesses have been fined. Jehovah's Witness Yevgeny Yakkhu was fined more than a year's average wage in his home region of Arkhangelsk.

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

21.01.2022 - Russia: Two Jehovah's Witnesses sentenced to four and seven years in prison

On January 20, 2022, the Seversky City Court found Jehovah's Witness Yevgeny Korotun guilty of organizing the activities of an extremist organization under Part 1 of Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code and sentenced to seven years in prison with subsequent restriction of liberty for two years and a five-year ban on working in educational institutions and "placement of any educational information", including on the Internet. Thus, the court granted the request of the prosecutor who asked for such a verdict during the [debate](#).

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

21.01.2022 - Jehovah's Witnesses from Kursk lose their appeal

On 20 January, a Kursk oblast court denied an appeal against a guilty verdict by a trial court for Jehovah's Witnesses Andrei Andreev, Andrei Ryshkov, Alexander Vospitaniuk, and Artem and Alevtina Bagratian. Thus the sentence has taken legal effect and the convicts received real prison time for their faith, a correspondent of the Credo.Press portal reports, citing a source among Russian Jehovah's Witnesses.

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

20.01.2022 - A Court convicted 70-year-old Ural-based retiree Lyudmila Salikova to serve a six-year suspended sentence for reading the Bible

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2022/01/201429.html>

On January 20, 2022, the judge of the Snezhinskiy City Court of the Chelyabinsk Region Timofey Smolyuk found Lyudmila Salikova guilty of organizing the activities of an extremist community and gave her a 6-year suspended sentence with a 4-year probation period for not giving up her faith in Jehovah God.

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

18.01.2022 - Some Jehovah's Witnesses benefit from Supreme Court's ruling

A Kamchatka territorial court, during a second consideration of the case, ruled three Jehovah's Witnesses to be not guilty: the married couple Konstantin and Snezhana Bazhenov and the retiree Vera Zolotova. Novaya Gazeta was told this in the European Association of Jehovah's Witnesses.

Previously all three were found guilty of participating in the activity of an extremist organization (part 2, article 282.2 of the Criminal Code).

[Continue reading...](#)

[**Further reading about Russia on our database**](#)

A Jehovah's Witness objector to military service fined for evasion of conscription

Sova Center (21.01.2022) - <https://bit.ly/3IHi6k8> - *On January 17, 2022, the Nevelsk City Court of the Sakhalin Region found Jehovah's Witness Yevgeny Kulakov guilty under Part 1 of Art. 328 of the Criminal Code (evasion of conscription) and fined him 120,000 rubles.*

The believer said that he was denied the right to alternative civil service. The court, according to him, provided false information that he, as a student, participated in military shootings, which means that he misled the state about his religious beliefs. At the same time, the organizer of the shootings denied this information, saying that no shootings were carried out on the day Kulakov was supposed to have taken part in them.

The prosecutor requested a punishment of 100,000 rubles fine, but the judge imposed a larger fine.

Evgeny's parents are accused under Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code (organization and participation in the activities of an extremist organization).

Picture: Old apartment block in Nevelsk on Sakhalin Island (Credit: Alamy)

Two Jehovah's Witnesses sentenced to four and seven years in prison

Over 80 Jehovah's Witnesses are in prison in Russia, including four of them sentenced in the first three weeks of January 2022

By Willy Fautré, director of Human Rights Without Frontiers

The European Times (01.21.2022) - <https://bit.ly/3GVzcu8> - On January 20, 2022, the Seversky City Court found Jehovah's Witness **Yevgeny Korotun** guilty of organizing the activities of an extremist organization under Part 1 of Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code and sentenced to seven years in prison with subsequent restriction of liberty for two

years and a five-year ban on working in educational institutions and "placement of any educational information", including on the Internet. Thus, the court granted the request of the prosecutor who asked for such a verdict during the [debate](#).

The initiation of criminal proceedings against Korotun [became known](#) in July 2020. He was placed under house arrest, but in September he [was](#) detained. According to the investigation, under the leadership of Korotun "from July 2017 to July 2020 in ZATO g. Seversk, Tomsk region, a group of persons organized the activities of the banned local community of Jehovah's Witnesses, knowing about its ban, held "closed conspiratorial meetings", distributed prohibited literature and worked "to recruit and involve new participants from among the residents of the city of Seversk". The court began consideration of the case in April 2021.

See more information about the case [here](#).

On the same day, the Seversky City Court found another Jehovah's Witness, **Andrei Kolesnichenko**, guilty of participating in the activities of an extremist organization under Part 2 of Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code. He was sentenced to four years in prison with subsequent restriction of liberty for a year.

Earlier during the [debate](#), the prosecutor asked Kolesnichenko to be sentenced to five years in prison and a year of restriction of liberty.

Kolesnichenko's case was initiated in March 2021 and has been considered since July. See more information about the case [here](#).

Jehovah's Witnesses are accused of involvement in the activities of an extremist organization due to the fact that in April 2017 the Supreme Court of Russia decided to recognize the Jehovah's Witnesses Management Center in Russia and 395 local religious organizations as extremist. We believe that this decision, which entailed mass

¹ FECRIS was created in 1994 by a French anti-cult association named UNADFI and receives all of its funding from the French government while its member associations may receive funding from their own governments, including in Russia through the Russian Orthodox Church.

³ Article on EIFRF website https://www.eifrf-articles.org/Why-FECRIS-should-be-held-responsible-for-its-Russian-members-activities_a238.html

⁴ USCIRF report, 2020, "The Anti-cult Movement and Religious Regulation in Russia and the Former Soviet Union" <https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2020%20Anti-Cult%20Update%20%20Religious%20Regulation%20in%20Russia.pdf>

⁵ "USCIRF Exposes European "Experts" Who Support CCP Campaigns Against "Cults", an article by Massimo Introvigne <https://bitterwinter.org/uscirf-exposes-who-support-ccp-campaigns/>

⁶ How the anti-cult movement has participated to fuel Russian anti-Ukraine rhetoric, an article by Jan-Leonid Bornstein <https://www.europeantimes.news/2022/03/how-the-anti-cult-movement-has-participated-to-fuel-russian-anti-ukraine-rhetoric/>

⁷ Anti-cult movement hunting pacifists for police in Russia: Back in the USSR, an article by Jan-Leonid Bornstein <https://www.europeantimes.news/2022/03/anti-cult-movement-hunting-pacifists-for-police-in-russia-back-in-the-ussr/>

⁸ Article on EIFRF website https://www.eifrf-articles.org/Why-FECRIS-should-be-held-responsible-for-its-Russian-members-activities_a238.html



⁹ “FECRIS and affiliates: Defamation is in their DNA”, an article by Willy Fautré, director and co-founder of Human Rights Without Frontiers International <https://freedomofbelief.net/articles/a-roundup-of-convictions-collected-by-fecris-in-europe>

¹⁰ Resolution of 7 April 2022 about the increasing repression in Russia, including the case of Alexei Navalny: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2022-0125_EN.html

¹¹ Message published on the website of the Russian Orthodox Church:

<http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/5900861.html>

¹² See <http://www.interfax-religion.com/?act=news&div=16449> and

<http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/5904390.html>

¹³ See <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/5906442.html>

¹⁴ See under Background below for the meaning of this concept, p.8.

¹⁵ <https://diplomatmagazine.eu/2021/07/04/the-law-the-rights-and-the-rules/>

¹⁶ “Russian Patriarch Says War on Terrorism Is ‘Holy War for All’”, pravoslavie.ru 19.10.2016.

¹⁷ “2000 Russian National Security Concept,” available at:

<http://www.russiaeurope.mid.ru/russiastrat2000.html>

¹⁸ Information Portal of the Russki Mir Foundation, 2017. <http://russkiymir.ru/rucenter/>.

¹⁹ Opening Remarks by Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov at Press Conference After Tenth Meeting of Working Group on MFA-Russian Orthodox Church Interaction, Moscow, 20.11.2007: http://www.mid.ru/en/vistupleniya_ministra/-/asset_publisher/MCZ7HQuMdqBY/content/id/356698

²⁰ The Presentation of Patriarch Kirill at the opening ceremony of the Third Assembly of the Russian World, Internet Journal of the Russian Orthodox Church 3.11.2009.

<http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/print/928446.html>.

²¹ <https://uacrasis.org/en/russkiy-mir-as-the-kremlin-s-quasi-ideology>, Оригінал стаммі - на сайті Українського кризового медіа-центру: <https://uacrasis.org/en/russkiy-mir-as-the-kremlin-s-quasi-ideology>.

²² “Spirituality as a political instrument”, the Finnish Institute of International Affairs, p.10 https://www.fiia.fi/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/wp98_russia.pdf.

²³ “Putin and the monk”, *Financial Times*, 25 January 2013.

<https://www.ft.com/content/f2fcba3e-65be-11e2-a3db-00144feab49a>.

²⁴ <https://fr.aleteia.org/2022/03/03/vladimir-poutine-a-la-reconquete-de-leglise-autocephale-ukrainienne/>

²⁵ *Bemba et al.*, Trial Judgment, para 89.

prosecution of believers in criminal proceedings, had no legal basis, and regard it as a manifestation of religious discrimination.

This is further evidence that local authorities continue to disregard Russia's Supreme Court Plenum back in October 2021 outlining that individual or collective worship should not in itself be viewed as participation in the activities of a banned religious organization.

Jarrod Lopes, spokesman for Jehovah's Witnesses states: "There are over 80 Jehovah's Witnesses in prison in Russia—the most since the Russian Supreme Court liquidated the Witnesses' legal entities in 2017. It's unthinkable that peaceful Christian family men like Yevgeniy and Andrey would be accused of extremist activity and given harsh, lengthy prison sentences usually reserved for violent criminals. The escalating discriminatory assault against Jehovah's Witnesses is putting a huge burden on a growing number of families to support themselves without the help of their husbands and fathers, who were often the family's primary source of income. In Yevgeniy's case, his son, Alexander, is only a preteen. He will now be forced to spend the rest of his childhood and teen years without his father. We hope that soon the callous persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia will end—families will no longer be needlessly separated—and they can worship freely in their home country as they 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.

Sources: Sova Centre (Moscow) – JW World Headquarters (New York)

Jehovah's Witnesses sent to prison in Russia in 2022

20 January 2022: Yevgeny Korotun, 52 years old (7 years + 2 years of restricted liberty)

20 January 2022: Andrei Kolesnichenko, 52 years old (4 years + 1 year of restricted liberty)

19 January 2022: Alexei Ershov, 68 years old (3 years)

17 January 2022: Maksim Beltikov, 42 years old (2 years)

Aleksei Yershov is already the second Jehovah's Witness to be sent behind bars in 2022

A court in Seversk sentenced this 68-year old Jehovah's Witness to three years in a penal colony. A week ago, [Maksim Nikolayevich Beltikov](#) was sentenced to two years in prison

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

The European Times (19.01.2022) - <https://bit.ly/3KqdpwC> - On 19 January 2022, Judge of the Seversky City Court of the Tomsk Region Yalchin Badalov found 68-year-old Jehovah's Witness Alexei Ershov guilty of participating in extremist activities (Part 2 of Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code) and sentenced him to three years in a penal colony. The convict was taken

into custody in the courtroom, reports the correspondent [of the Portal "Credo.Press"](#) with reference to sources among Russian Jehovah's Witnesses.

The prosecutor's office had asked the court to reclassify him under Part 1 of Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code (organization of the activities of an extremist organization) and sentence Ershov to five years in prison but he was not followed by the court.

Yershov case history

In July 2020, the regional investigative committee announced the [initiation of criminal proceedings](#) against a group of persons who organized the activities of the banned local community of Jehovah's Witnesses, knowing about its ban. Then Ershov and other believers' houses were searched.

In March 2021, Ershov and three other Jehovah's Witnesses were summoned for questioning and notified that they had received the status [of suspects](#) after a woman named Klira Klisheva collaborating with the FSB services had put video recordings of Jehovah's Witnesses at their disposal. For about a year, she had pretended to be interested in the Bible but was obviously infiltrating their community.

Ershov, in particular, was accused of "taking part in a conspiratorial meeting in the form of a collective religious service, <...> consisting of reproduction of audio and video recordings and <...> consistently performed songs from a special collection of religious teachings of Jehovah's Witnesses and prayers to God Jehovah".

The trial began in July 2021.

When Klira Klisheva was asked why she determined that Jehovah's Witnesses were extremists, she answered in court: "Because they pronounce the name of God - Yahweh." Such testimony of this witness is based on the accusations against five more believers from Seversk.

In his closing statements to the court ([link](#)), Aleksei defended himself and other Jehovah's Witnesses by frequently quoting from Russian religious scholar Sergei Ivanenko's book, "About people who never part with the Bible." Aleksey concluded: "The facts in this book show that Witnesses do not resort to violence, work conscientiously, pay taxes honestly, and generally have strong, close-knit families. Living in accordance with biblical principles, they are reliable workers, good neighbors, caring parents. They do not impose their views on anyone. To listen to their preaching or not is a matter of conscience and free choice of each person."

Jarrod Lopes, spokesman for Jehovah's Witnesses states: "There now over 80 Jehovah's Witnesses in prison in Russia. This is the highest number since the Russian Supreme Court liquidated the Witnesses' legal entities in 2017. It's patently absurd that a peaceful Christian family man like Aleksei would be accused of extremist activity. It's yet another miscarriage of justice on the part of the Russian courts that began with local authorities unjustly raiding homes of Witnesses. For those who have not seen video footage of such raids, visualize officers with face masks, fully armed and outfitted for combat, gang- raiding homes of peaceful Jehovah's Witnesses. The officers often breakdown the doors while people are sleeping, sometimes torturing and beating one of the believers while their families in earshot are forced to listen to the screaming. Now who are the extremists in that scenario? Any reasonable person would agree, it's not the Jehovah's Witnesses. We hope that soon this systematic discriminatory assault on Jehovah's Witnesses will end so they can worship freely in Russia as they do in over 200 other lands."

In November 2021, the same court sentenced 80-year-old Elena Savelyeva, a teacher with forty years of experience, to four years probation - also for talking about the Bible. In total, since May 2018, seven criminal cases have been initiated against Jehovah's Witnesses in the sole Tomsk region.

Additional background on the case can be found [here](#).

This case is further evidence that local authorities continue to disregard Russia's Supreme Court Plenum back in October 2021 that outlined that individual or collective worship should not in itself be viewed as participation in the activities of a banned religious organization.

What happened since the Supreme Court Plenum?

- Five Jehovah's Witnesses (including Aleksei) sentenced to prison colonies (sentences from 2.5-5 years)
- 11 have received suspended prison sentences ranging from 2.5-6 years (the oldest being 80-year old Yelena Savelyeva)
- Five have been fined between 300,000-500,000 rubles

The Supreme Court of the Russian Federation recognized all 396 religious organizations of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia as extremist in April 2017. Soon after, law enforcement agencies began criminal prosecution of believers of this denomination in almost all regions of the country, including in the annexed territory of Crimea.

Photo : Credit: credo.press

Special Bimonthly FORB Digest (01–15.01.2022)

14.01.2022 - Court approves sentencing of three Jehovah's Witnesses from Pavlov

On January 14, 2022, the Nizhny Novgorod Regional Court upheld the conviction of Alexei Oreshkov, Alexander Rakovsky, and Alexander Vavilov, Jehovah's Witnesses from Pavlov, under Part 2 of Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code (participation in the activities of an extremist organization).

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13.01.2022 - The federal list of extremist materials has grown to item 526

On January 12, 2022, the federal list of extremist materials was updated. The list was supplemented by several issues of the Islamic magazine Al-Wai, an audio recording of the life of a thief, and an appendix of Jehovah's Witnesses.

[Continue reading...](#)

13.01.2022 - Kostroma Regional Court approved a real term for Jehovah's Witness Terebilov

On January 12, 2022, the Kostroma Regional Court considered an appeal against the sentence handed down in September to Jehovah's Witness Dmitry Terebilov under Part 2 of Art. 282.2 (participation in the activities of an extremist organization). The sentence imposed on him in the form of three years of imprisonment in a strict regime colony was left unchanged.

[Continue reading...](#)

13.01.2022 - Verdict on Jehovah's Witness Schmidt confirmed in Sevastopol

On January 13, 2021, the Sevastopol City Court upheld the sentence handed down by the Gagarinsky District Court of the city in October to Jehovah's Witness Igor Shmidt. 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 six years in prison.

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12.01.2022 - Case against Jehovah's Witness initiated in Nizhny Novgorod

On November 12, 2021, the Main Investigation Department of the Main Directorate of the Ministry of Internal Affairs for the Nizhny Novgorod Region opened a case against Jehovah's Witness Gevorg Gevorkyan under Part 1 of Art. 282.2 (organization of activities of an extremist organization).

[Continue reading...](#)

12.01.2022 - Case of ten Hizb ut-Tahrir supporters submitted to court

The case will be considered by the Central District Military Court.

On December 12, 2022, it became known that FSB officers had transferred to the Central District Court the case of ten supporters of the radical Islamic party Hizb ut-Tahrir, which is recognized as a terrorist organization in Russia. Eight of them - Damir Abdrafikov, Ruslan Bariev, Rafis Idrisov, Farrukh Makhkamov, Shakhboz Makhmudov, Turatbek Osmankulov, Aidar Tashbulatov, Ruslan Fomin - are charged under Part 2 of Art. 205.5 of the Criminal Code (participation in the activities of a terrorist organization).

[Continue reading...](#)

12.01.2022 - Appeals court defies instructions from Supreme Court in Jehovah's Witnesses case

Link to full text in Russian: <https://www.kavkaz-uzel.media/articles/372127/>

The cassation court in Krasnodar left in force the decision in the case of the Jehovah's Witness Semen Baibak from Rostov-on-Don, who was sentenced to three and a half years in a case about participation in an extremist organization and its financing.

As Kavkazskii Uzel has written, Semen Baibak was arrested in June 2019. On 21

December 2020 a court sentenced him to a suspended sentence of 3.5 years in prison, having found him to be a member of an extremist organization (part 2, article 282.2 of CC RF) and guilty of financing its activity (part 1, article 282.3 CC RF).



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10.01.2022 - In Khabarovsk, the court will reconsider the case of six Jehovah's Witnesses

On January 10, 2022, a new trial of the case of six Jehovah's Witnesses charged under Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code (organization of the activities of an extremist organization or participation in one); The case went to court on December 15, 2021. Recall that earlier, on August 3, 2020, the Industrialny District Court, after 20 meetings, returned this case to the prosecutor's office to eliminate violations in the indictment, and on October 12, 2020, the Khabarovsk regional court upheld this decision, rejecting the appeal of the prosecutor's office.

[Continue reading...](#)

05.01.2022 - Nikolsk Court hands a three-year suspended sentence to the Krupnovs for discussing the Bible

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2021/12/310839.html>

On December 30, 2021, the judge of the Nikolsk District Court of the Penza Region, Irina Kuznetsova, sentenced Petr Krupnov and his wife, Maya, to 3 years probation and 8 months of freedom restrictions. The judge considered the discussion of the biblical commandments as participation in the activities of a banned organization.

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Prospects for religious freedom in Russian-occupied Ukraine

By Dr Aaron Rhodes for Human Rights Without Frontiers

HRWF (14.01.2022) - In 2014, the Russian Federation brought parts of Ukraine's Donbas region under its effective control by a process of military infiltration in collusion with pro-Russian separatists, promoting the establishment of two entities, the Donetsk People's Republic (DPR) and the Luhansk People's Republic (LPR), loyal to Russia. Russia also annexed Crimea outright, incorporating the Republic of Crimea as a Russian federal subject.

Ukrainian citizens now face the prospect of further military and cyber assault by the Russian Federation or perhaps a coup d'état, leading to more parts of the country being brought under Russian dominion; indeed, some foresee an attempt to reconstruct a new Russian empire among states that declared their independence following the collapse of the Soviet Union. While many in the international community focus on the grave geopolitical implications of

these scenarios, it is also important to understand how human rights have been curtailed in occupied regions where laws and administrative practices have been changed by Russian authorities, and thus how these patterns might be extended.

Russian control in occupied parts of Ukraine has particularly affected the fundamental right to freedom of religion and belief. Not surprisingly, respect for religious freedom in Donbas and Crimea has been sharply degraded to mirror, in important respects, the situation in the Russian Federation itself. Over the past several decades, the Russian state has introduced increasingly intrusive and restrictive legislation in this area, aimed in particular at minority religions. In 2021, the United States Commission on International Freedom (USCIRF) named the Russian Federation a “Country of Particular Concern,” along with a small group of other states including Iran and North Korea, [noting](#) that the government “continued to target ‘nontraditional’ religious minorities with fines, detentions, and criminal charges.” Russian legislation criminalizes “extremism” without adequately defining the term, enabling the state to prosecute a vast range of nonviolent religious activity. The government has banned as “extremist” the Jehovah’s Witnesses altogether, making it illegal for about 170,000 people to practice their religion; the USCIRF report noted that 188 criminal cases had been brought against members of the group, and that “instances of torture” continued “to go uninvestigated and unpunished.” Hizb ut-Tahrir, an Islamic organization, has been banned in Russia since 2003, and numerous members have been sentenced to prison by Russian courts for so-called “terrorist” activities, sentences that have been [condemned](#) by Human Rights Watch.

Restrictions on freedom of religion in occupied Ukraine follow these patterns. Russian authorities in Crimea have [prosecuted](#) numerous Tatars, indigenous Turkic Muslims, associating them with Hizb ut-Tharir and charging them with extremism and terrorism; scores remain incarcerated on charges deemed as misuses of Russian anti-terrorist legislation by [reliable civil society experts](#). According to the American-based NGO Freedom House, citizens were encouraged to [inform](#) on any who voiced opposition to these policies to the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB).

The Russian Federation ban on the Jehovah’s Witnesses has also been applied in Crimea; five members of the faith have been [jailed](#) there. Jehovah’s Witnesses are also banned in both the Russian-backed “Luhansk People’s Republic” and the “Donetsk People’s Republic.” The UN’s Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights [found](#) that numerous religious groups that had been recognized under Ukrainian law were denied registration in these illegal jurisdictions for allegedly not meeting criteria applied in the Russian Federation; Baptists; Pentecostals, and Seventh-Day-Adventists have thus been denied registration.

Russian occupied and controlled parts of Ukraine have been subjected to policies aimed at coercing citizens to embrace the Moscow Patriarchate of the Eastern Orthodox Church, and destabilizing the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU), which Russian authorities see as an obstacle to the spiritual, as well as political unification of the two countries. The Brussels-based NGO International Partnership for Human Rights (IPHR), along with the Center for Civil Liberties, wrote in a [2015 report](#) that in the Donbas, the “Orthodox religion is used as an ideological foundation of ‘state building’ by the rebel groups and anything that is non-Russian Orthodox is seen as alien.” The groups reported that over the year since the conflict began, “dozens of places of worship have been seized,” and “cases of abduction, torture and other ill treatment as well as the murder of clergy members and the prohibition of religious practice other than that of the Orthodoxy of Moscow Patriarchy in the region.” In the

subsequent years, Russia has continually fomented tensions between the two branches of Eastern Orthodoxy.

The basis for these policies was clearly enunciated by Russian president Vladimir Putin in an [article](#) he published in June of 2021, entitled “On the Historical Unity of Ukrainians and Russian.” In the article, Putin wrote that the Moscow Patriarchate of the Eastern

Orthodox Church was the “centuries-old symbol” of the “kinship” between Russians and Ukrainians, and dismissed the OCU as a political construction by secular authorities dating back to when Ukraine was part of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania.

Religious freedom is at the center of Russia’s challenge to Ukrainian sovereignty and identity, and calls to respect freedom of religion need to be at the center of state and civil society advocacy aimed at returning Russian-occupied regions to Ukraine. Under the current unstable and violence ridden status quo, European and international authorities must hold the Russian Federation accountable for upholding the freedom of religion and all legal human rights obligations in regions that Russia illegally occupies. But to do so risks indirectly acknowledging and legitimizing Russian rule. No demand to respect the basic freedoms of people in Russian occupied Ukraine should imply recognition of Russian sovereignty over these regions; all should insist on upholding internationally recognized borders.

*Aaron Rhodes is Senior Fellow in the Common Sense Society and President of the Forum for Religious Freedom Europe. He is the author of *The Debasement of Human Rights* (*



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