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Churches collect 1 billion rubles (10 million EUR) for 'people in need' in occupied territories

The collaboration between religious groups and their own state in the invasion of a neighbouring country raises moral and theological questions

Willy Fautré, director of Human Rights Without Frontiers



Oleg Goncharov: the state is not pressuring the religions of the Russian Federation, they themselves collected a billion rubles in total for the victims of war (Credit: IRP)

HRWF (21.03.2023) - On 28 February 2023, a webinar titled "**Religious Factor in Modern Political and Economic Life of Europe**" was held by the **Institute of Scientific Information for Social Sciences of the Russian Academy of Sciences**, [INION RAN](#), and the **Institute of Europe of the Russian Academy of Sciences in Moscow**.

[According](#) to Roman Lunkin, Deputy Director of the Institute of Europe of the Russian Academy of Sciences, religious organizations of the Russian Federation freely decided to collect funds "to help those in need during the Special Military Operation in Ukraine," provide social and humanitarian assistance.

Social and humanitarian assistance in Russian-occupied territories

In an article published on 1 March 2023 by the **Institute of Religion and Policy**, and titled "[Religions in the Russian Federation have raised a billion dollars for war victims](#)," Pastor Oleg Goncharov (Seventh-Day Adventist Church), Secretary General of the Russian Association for Religious Freedom and member of the Presidential Council, was quoted as saying:

“Basically, all associations focused on social assistance to those in need. Although there have been and are political statements from church leaders, everyone is united in the organization of humanitarian projects.”

“While most of the donations and other assistance are collected by the Russian Orthodox Church, Evangelical Protestant Churches have also made a significant contribution. Protestants have begun to regularly support residents of Mariupol since April 2022, various churches have had projects in Donbass since 2014. At Christmas, clothes and gifts were distributed in Lugansk.”

As Goncharov noted, he was impressed by the trip to [Lugansk](#) in December 2022, where Orthodox, Muslims, Protestants, Jews distributed food to children and the elderly together.

According to Goncharov, “The churches are working with the Ministry of Defense on this occasion.”

Questions:

- **Who were the providers of one billion rubles?**
- **How were they collected?**
- **Should religious communities collaborate with the Ministry of Defence of their aggressor country?**
- **Isn't this some form of complicity and support to the invasion of a sovereign country?**

The “New Russian Territories” of the Russian Federation and Russian religions

Under cover of interreligious dialogue, the Russian Orthodox Church and Patriarch Kirill who fully support Putin’s war on Ukraine are now involving other Russian churches and religious groups in the “New Territories” ideology and the colonization thereof.

This is obvious in the article [“New Territories of the Russian Federation were discussed by the bodies under the President of the Department for External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate.”](#) published on 1 March 2023 by the Institute of Religion and Policy:

“The meeting, which was chaired by DECR Chairman, Head of the Commission on International Cooperation, **Metropolitan Anthony of Volokolamsk**, was attended by:

Deputy Head of the Office of the President of the Russian Federation for Internal Policy **Anatoly Vylegzhanin**;

Head of the Department for Interaction with Religious Organizations of the Office of the President of the Russian Federation for Internal Policy **Yevgeny Eremin**;

Advisor to the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia Archpriest **Nikolai Balashov**;

Representative of the Russian and New Nakhichevan Diocese of the Armenian Apostolic Church Priest **Gevorg Vardanyan**;

Chief Bishop of the Russian United Union of Christians of the Evangelical Faith (Pentecostals) **Sergei Ryakhovsky**;

Deputy Chairman of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the Russian Federation for International Affairs **Rushan Abbyasov**;

Deputy Archbishop of **Shafiq Pshikhachev**;

Did Hambo Lama Buddhist Traditional Sangha of Russia **Dashi-Nima Sodnomdorzhiev**;

First Deputy Chairman of the Euro-Asian Division of the General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Christian Church **Oleg Goncharov**, as well as other members of the Commission and invited officials.

"New Territories"

Hieromonk Stefan (Igumnov), Secretary of the Department of the Inter-Christian Relations, told the experience of religious organizations of the Russian Federation in providing humanitarian assistance to residents of the Donetsk and Luhansk Republics, Zaporozhye and Kherson regions.

According to **Rushan Abbyasov**, he conveyed to the audience the words of greetings on behalf of the Chairman of the SAM of the Russian Federation and JIM **Mufti Sheikh Ravil Gainutdin**.

In the context of discussing the first topic of the meeting related to the provision of humanitarian assistance to residents of the **"new territories"** of Russia, Rushan Abbyasov said that "with the blessing of Mufti Sheikh Ravil Gainutdin, the organizations he heads are doing a lot of work in this direction, as well as **supporting our fighters on the front line and visit the wounded in hospitals.**"

Interreligious dialogue

Archpriest **Sergei Zvonarev**, Secretary of the SPRC for Far Abroad, Executive Secretary of the Commission on International Cooperation, made a presentation on the prospects for the participation of traditional religious organizations of the Russian Federation in **global interreligious meetings**.

When discussing issues of international cooperation, he noted the importance of public diplomacy, **Roushan Abbyasov** spoke about the contribution of the SAM of the Russian Federation and the JIM to the development of Russia's relations with the Islamic world, through the signing of Memoranda of Understanding, the implementation of joint humanitarian, cultural, religious and spiritual and educational projects.

Concluding the meeting, **Metropolitan Anthony** wished all those present blessed success in their future work."

Questions:

- **How can Russian Protestants, Muslims, Buddhists and others accept in their soul and conscience to endorse Russia's aggression of Ukraine, Russia's invasion and colonization of Ukrainian territories.**
- **How can they accept to work in the so-called 'New Territories' with the blessing of the ROC and the Kremlin?**
- **How long can Adventist, Evangelical, Muslim, Buddhist... organizations in Europe and America tolerate the justification of the war and occupation by their brothers and sisters in Russia.**



In the Department for External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate, at a joint meeting on February 27, 2023, the bodies of the Council for Cooperation with Religious Associations under the President of the Russian Federation - the Commission on International Cooperation and the Interreligious Working Group for the Protection of Believers from Discrimination and Xenophobia discussed Russian "new territories" and work there, as reported by the [DECR](#).

500 religious buildings damaged and over 20 clerics murdered in Ukraine

Hearing about Russia's invasion of Ukraine and its implications for religious freedom

HRWF (20.03.2023) - Since Russian President Vladimir Putin launched the full-scale military invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, Russian forces have committed numerous religious freedom and other related human rights violations in Ukraine, including the killing and torture of religious leaders and the destruction of countless houses of worship.

This is the general topic that was addressed by USCIRF (*), the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, and its guest speakers at the hearing it organized on March 15 from Washington to discuss **Russia's Invasion of Ukraine: Implications for Religious Freedom**.

Russian officials have turned to antisemitic rhetoric and Holocaust distortion in order to try to justify the country's groundless invasion. In the areas of Ukraine that Russia has occupied since 2014, its de facto authorities and proxies have imposed draconian laws to

suppress religious communities such as the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, predominantly Muslim Crimean Tatars and Jehovah's Witnesses. Meanwhile, in Russia, the state has continued to prosecute an ever-growing list of religious groups as so-called "extremists" for their peaceful religious activities and launched a ruthless campaign to silence civil society and independent media.

USCIRF Chair **Nury Turkel** opened the hearing. In a video message Republican Senator **Roger Wicker** urged holding Russian President Putin accountable as he is one of the worst international violators of religious freedom, he stressed. Putin wants to go back to the old Soviet empire and has used religious nationalism to advance his cause, framing the war in these terms, he noted.

Dmytro Vovk, Visiting Associate Professor at Cardozo School of Law and member of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR)'s Panel of Experts on Freedom of Religion or Belief said that murders, torture, forced detention, acts of vandalism, and social hatred directed by the Russian forces are part of the everyday reality in the territories occupied by Russian forces. Since the invasion started, the Russian military has damaged 500 religious buildings, and over twenty religious figures have been murdered.

With Russia engaging aggressively in the newly occupied territories, Vovk urged to keep monitoring the situation by focusing on freedom of religious violations. This will help to raise global awareness, he said. Vovk recommended sanctioning those responsible, including the Moscow Patriarch, and urged facilitating legal support to the Ukrainian government regarding national security and religious issues. There should be restrictions against those religious leaders who support the war. The US government should support those leaders who are against the war, he stressed.

Rachel Denber, Deputy Director of the Europe and Central Asia Division at Human Rights Watch said that throughout the past decades the Kremlin has been trying to decimate a robust civil society in Russia, in a step-by-step repression. In this process, the authorities have abused Russia's extremism laws in order to persecute religious minorities. "The authorities are suspicious of any institution that they don't control", stressed Denber. They have continued to push traditional values and demonized anything they perceive as a threat.

The panel also heard from **Dennis Christensen**, a former religious prisoner of conscience and the first Jehovah's Witness to be convicted and imprisoned in Russia after its Supreme Court in 2017 labeled Jehovah's Witnesses "extremist" and banned their activities. Christensen was arrested in May 2017 during a worship service and sentenced to six years in prison for "organizing the activities of an extremist organization." On May 24, 2022, Christensen was released after serving his sentence and subsequently deported to his homeland, Denmark. In the hearing, he spoke of the Russian prison system as he experienced it for years throughout his detention. "Constant violations of religious freedom continue, it goes on and it is getting worse and worse", he added.

A Crimean Tatar's testimony was read out during the hearing, as he or she could not be present for fear of retribution. Since the 2014 Crimean occupation, Russia has used a variety of methods, including enforced disappearance of activists, convictions, in order to repress the Tatar community. The authorities imposed the mandatory re-registration of religious organizations in line with Russian laws, and the occupying forces also often dismissed applications for re-registration. There were 2200 religious organizations in the region before 2016, fewer than 800 remain after the occupation. The occupying authorities have used legislation to combat terror and anti-extremism to persecute religious groups, forcing Crimean Tatars that opposed the occupation to yield and accept the situation. This sent a message that no one is safe.

In the words of Chief Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt, President of the Conference of European Rabbis and Exiled Chief Rabbi of Moscow, the Jewish community in Russia is a community in distress. Under Putin the political system has become more and more authoritarian, and since the unprovoked war against Ukraine even semi-totalitarian. "War is a catastrophe for the Jewish community in both countries", he said. But feelings of anti-Semitism are not grass root, but top down, government-led. Since the beginning of the war 30% left. Yet, not everyone can leave, Chief Rabbi noted, worried about the state of the Jewish community.

The panelists agreed that for the religious communities in Russia the situation can still get a lot worse. The West should therefore do much more to support the opposition, because they can bring change to the country. Ukraine remains the main victim of Russian aggression, but the West must also support other countries in the region, such as the Baltics or Poland, in order to prevent further aggression.

(*) USCIRF is an independent, bipartisan US federal government commission created by the 1998 International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA). USCIRF uses international standards to monitor violations of religious freedom or belief abroad and makes policy recommendations to the President, the Secretary of State, and Congress.

More reading

Mapping dated 26 March 2022: <https://bit.ly/42ml6qv>

Mapping dated 3 February 2023: <https://bit.ly/3JNggZH>

Christianity Today: <https://bit.ly/3LI3eqe>

World Council of Churches: <https://bit.ly/3Fzw604>

Photo: Mother of God Joy of All Who Sorrow Orthodox Church in the village Bohorodychne, Donetsk Oblast, Ukraine. The village came under attack by Russian forces in June 2022. Photo: Volodymyr Kutsenko

Religious persecution and issues – Bimonthly digest March 01 -15

15.03.2023 - The Supreme Court overturned the acquittal of three Jehovah's Witnesses from Karpinsk

Sova Center - On March 14, 2023, the Supreme Court of Russia overturned the acquittal of **Alexander Pryanikov, Venera and Daria Dulov**. Their case under Part 2 of Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code (participation in the activities of an extremist organization) was sent for reconsideration to the appellate instance.

Recall that the case of Pryanikov and the Dulovs was initiated in the summer of 2018. In January 2020, they were given suspended sentences for the first time, but in August of the same year, the Sverdlovsk Regional Court overturned the sentence and sent the case back for a new trial.

[Continue reading...](#)

14.03.2023 - Now 12 jailed Crimean prisoners of conscience

Forum 18 - **Aleksandr Litvinyuk** is not due to complete his jail term and post-prison restrictions until the mid-2030s, by which time he would be over 75. Armyansk Prosecutor's Office refused to put Forum 18 through to Prosecutor Minigul Saddykova, who led the prosecution case in court. Litvinyuk is among 12 Jehovah's Witnesses from Russian-occupied Crimea now jailed for at least six years to punish their exercise of freedom of religion or belief. Two more are serving suspended sentences including **Darya Kuzio**, wife of one of the prisoners.

[Continue reading...](#)

14.03.2023 - A Jehovah's Witness living in Stavropol is being persecuted under Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code in the KChR

Sova center - On March 3, 2023, the home of Jehovah's Witness Alexei Pasyukov was searched in Stavropol. Earlier, on December 8, 2022, he became a suspect under Part 1 of Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code (organization of the activities of an extremist organization). The case is being investigated by the Zelenchuk Interdistrict Investigation Department of the Investigation Department of the Investigative Committee for Karachay-Cherkessia.

[Continue reading...](#)

13.03.2023 - Sentence passed on followers of Said Nursi from Naberezhnye Chelny

Sova Center - On March 13, 2023, the Naberezhnye Chelny City Court sentenced local residents **Khunar Agaev, Aidar Sageev and Amrakh Akhmedov**, finding them guilty of involvement in the banned religious association Nurcular.

The court appointed Agaev and Sageev two and a half years in a general regime colony under Part 1 of Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code (organization of the activities of an extremist organization), in Akhmedova - a year and a half of imprisonment under part 2 of Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code (participation in the activities of an extremist organization).

[Continue reading...](#)

09.03.2023 - The Court of Cassation upheld the verdict convicting four believers from Chita. Three will spend from 6 to 6.5 years in penal colonies

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2023/03/091402.html>

On March 7, 2023, the Eighth Court of Cassation of General Jurisdiction in Kemerovo confirmed the verdict and the appeal ruling against four Chita residents for their faith, as final. The court hearing was held via videoconferencing.

The court of first instance convicted **Vladimir Ermolaev, Aleksandr Putintsev, Igor Mamalimov and Sergey Kirilyuk** of extremism for their peaceful religious beliefs on June 6, 2022, and on September 20 of the same year, the court of appeal upheld this

decision. All convicts are already detained in penal colonies, except Sergey Kirilyuk, who was given a 6-year suspended sentence.

[Continue reading...](#)

07.03.2023 - Case of Jehovah's Witness from Orel brought to court

Sova Center - **Tatyana Piskareva** is accused of participating in the activities of a banned community.

On March 7, 2023, the Investigative Committee of the Investigative Committee for the Oryol Region announced that the case had been transferred to court under Part 2 of Art. 282 of the Criminal Code (participation in the activities of an extremist organization) against a 66-year-old Jehovah's Witness. Obviously, we are talking about **Tatyana Piskareva**.

[Continue reading...](#)

07.03.2023 - Criminal case initiated against Jehovah's Witnesses in Vladivostok

Sova Center - Two believers were sent to a pre-trial detention center, another one was placed under house arrest, one was placed under a ban on certain actions, and a written undertaking not to leave was taken from six more.

On March 5, 2023, as part of the investigation of a criminal case under all three parts of Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code (organizing the activities of an extremist organization, involving others in its activities and participation in such activities), searches were carried out against Jehovah's Witnesses at ten addresses in Vladivostok. According to the Investigative Committee, a written undertaking not to leave was taken from six people, and they wanted to send four more into custody.

[Continue reading...](#)

06.03.2023 - Court of Appeal in Chelyabinsk upheld the verdict against Andrey Perminov, one of Jehovah's Witnesses. Disabled person will serve a 6-year suspended sentence

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2023/03/060938.html>

On March 3, 2023, the Chelyabinsk Regional Court upheld the verdict against **Andrey Perminov** who is disabled — a 6-year suspended sentence. Judge Marina Klyushina agreed with the ruling of the court of first instance to deem peaceful religious services and discussions of the Bible to be extremism.

The verdict has entered into force. Although the legislation of the Russian Federation does not classify the dissemination and practice of the religion of Jehovah's Witnesses as extremism, the courts interpreted the believer's actions as organizing the activity of an extremist organization. The prosecutor's office found the ruling of the court of first instance to be too lenient and appealed it.

[Continue reading...](#)

03.03.2023 - The Khabarovsk Regional Court considered the appeal of a Jehovah's Witness

Sova center - On March 1, 2023, the Khabarovsk Regional Court considered an appeal in the case of Jehovah's Witness Egor Baranov. Earlier, on June 6, 2022, the Vyazemsky District Court of the Khabarovsk Territory sentenced Baranov to five years of suspended imprisonment, finding him guilty of CC. 1.1 and 2 Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code (involvement in the activities of an extremist organization and participation in it). The regional court reduced this term by six months - up to four and a half years of suspended sentence.

[Continue reading...](#)

03.03.2023 - 'Court' in Russian-occupied Crimea passes long sentences against three Ukrainian Jehovah's Witnesses

khpg.org - The Russian occupation 'Yalta municipal court' has convicted four Jehovah's Witnesses of preposterous charges based solely on the Ukrainians' faith, with three men sentenced to long terms of imprisonment. Instead of complying with international law which prohibits an occupying state from applying its legislation on occupied territory, Russia's religious persecution in occupied Crimea is worse even than that on Russian territory. If in Russia, 'judges' do fairly often pass suspended sentences, virtually all 'trials' in occupied Crimea have ended in terms of imprisonment of between 6 and 7 years.

[Continue reading...](#)

02.03.2023 - Court of Appeal in Birobidzhan upheld the verdict for Svetlana Monis. A 2.5-year suspended sentence for her faith.

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2023/03/020856.html>

On February 28, 2023, the Court of the Jewish Autonomous Region considered the case of **Svetlana Monis**, one of Jehovah's Witnesses, for the third time. The appeals panel approved the decision of the lower court: for her faith she was found guilty of participating in extremist activity and given a 2.5-year suspended sentence.

In May 2021, the Court of the Jewish Autonomous Region replaced the fine imposed on Monis with a 2.5-year suspended imprisonment. Later, the court of cassation overturned this decision. In March 2022, after a second appeal the case was returned to the Birobidzhan District Court for a new trial. This time, the court of first instance imposed a 2.5-year suspended sentence.

[Continue reading...](#)

Six years and five months of prison for a Jehovah's Witness

[The European Times](#) (13.03.2023) - Despite Russia's war in Ukraine and a decision of the [European Court](#) in 2022 urging Russia to stop all pending criminal proceedings against Jehovah's Witnesses, Putin has not halted his repression policy against Jehovah's Witnesses.

Konstantin Sannikov sentenced to 6 years and 5 months in a penal colony

On 15 February 2023, the Sovetskiy District Court of Kazan sentenced **Konstantin Sannikov** to 6 years and 5 months in a penal colony. For conducting peaceful religious services of Jehovah's Witnesses, the court found him guilty of extremism.

Throughout the preliminary investigation and trial – for more than two years – Konstantin has been in a detention center.

In August 2020, the FSB of Tatarstan initiated a criminal case under part 1 of Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation (organizing the activity of an extremist organization) against Konstantin Sannikov, doctor of forensics and the father of 4 children. Conversations about the Bible among friends were regarded as organizing extremist activity. Sannikov was placed in a detention center, and his bank accounts were frozen. In August 2021, court hearings began. While in custody for about two years, he was never allowed a visit from his wife. During his imprisonment, his chronic illnesses worsened. In court, his boss spoke of him as a responsible and honest worker who had never been reprimanded, but, on the contrary, repeatedly received commendation, incentives and awards. The testimonies of secret witnesses did not correspond to reality and indicated personal aversion to this denomination.

On 20 February 2023, the Vakhitovsky District Court of Kazan found **Andrey Bochkarev** guilty of organizing the activities of an extremist organization. He pleaded non-guilty. He was sentenced to three years and one month of imprisonment, but he was released in the courtroom, since he has actually served his long term in a pre-trial detention center!

During the first two months and a half of 2023, there were also a lot of suspended sentences to prison; appeal courts and the Cassation Court also confirmed the sentences to effective prison terms of many other Jehovah's Witnesses who were already in pretrial detention. [LINK](#).

The European Court of Human Rights [ruled](#) that the Russian Federation "must take all necessary measures to secure the discontinuation of all pending criminal proceedings against Jehovah's Witnesses... and the release of all Jehovah's Witnesses in custody" (§ 285).

Photo courtesy of: jw-russia.org - Sannikov Konstantin Yevgeniyevich Russia JW photo.png

'Court' in Russian-occupied Crimea passes long sentences against three Ukrainian Jehovah's Witnesses

By Halya Coynash

[KHPJ](#) (03.03.2023) - The Russian occupation 'Yalta municipal court' **has convicted** four Jehovah's Witnesses of preposterous charges based solely on the Ukrainians' faith, with three men sentenced to long terms of imprisonment. Instead of complying with international law which prohibits an occupying state from applying its legislation on occupied territory, Russia's religious persecution in occupied Crimea is worse even than that on Russian territory. If in Russia, 'judges' do fairly often pass suspended sentences, virtually all 'trials' in occupied Crimea have ended in terms of imprisonment of between 6 and 7 years.

The charges in all such cases derive solely from the intentionally condemned ruling by Russia's Supreme Court on 20 April 2017 which outlawed the Jehovah's Witnesses, claiming that this world faith was 'an extremist organization'. Russia has since unleashed waves of religious persecution at home and in occupied Crimea, hiding behind its profoundly flawed legislation on so-called 'extremism.'

Four believers were on 'trial': **Taras Kuzio** (b. 1978); his wife **Daria Kuzio** (b. 1982); **Petro Zhiltsov** (b. 1987) and **Serhiy Liulin** (b. 1984). The sentences were passed by 'judge' **Volodymyr Romanenko** on 27 February 2023, after a 'trial' that had lasted almost a year. This was the first time in occupied Crimea that a new charge was laid with two of the men: Taras Kuzio and Petro Zhiltsov accused of 'financing an extremist organization' under Article 282.3 § 1 of Russia's criminal code, as well as of 'organizing' such an 'organization' (Article 282.2 § 1). The sheer meaningless of these charges is only highlighted by the fact that Zhiltsov and Liulin received identical sentences although Zhiltsov faced two charges, and Liulin only one.

Despite the fact that the couple have two young children (a son aged 9 and 6-year-old daughter), the prosecutor had demanded a 7.5-year sentence against Taras Kuzio and a real 3-year sentence against Daria Kuzio, with this to be deferred until the younger child turned 14. 7-year sentences were sought against both Zhiltsov and Liulin.

Romanenko sentenced **Taras Kuzio** to 6.5 years' imprisonment; **Petro Zhiltsov** and **Serhiy Liulin** to 6.1 years. He imposed a 3.5-year suspended sentence against **Daria Kuzio**. It is worth noting, however, that suspended sentences can become real at any moment if the person is deemed to have 'repeated the offence'. Like the others, Daria Kuzio has effectively been 'found guilty' of what she never for a second denied, and doubtless has no intention of renouncing now, namely her religious beliefs. The sentences are not final, and will be appealed, however the only appeals with respect to Crimean prisoners of conscience which have, up till now, been allowed have been those by the prosecutor against sentences deemed 'too lenient'.

Taras Kuzio was first mentioned as facing charges after a wave of armed searches in Yalta on 20 March 2019, however at that stage it was only **Artem Gerasimov** who ended up 'on trial' ([and sentenced to 6 years' imprisonment](#)).

On 11 March 2021, the FSB stormed at least nine homes of believers in Yalta, including that of the Kuzio family. The FSB removed electronic devices and Bibles, and took Taras away. He was, however, only in custody for two days, with an occupation 'judge' at least rejecting the application for him to be placed in detention, because of his small children, and placing him under house arrest. He was initially charged only with 'financing a supposedly extremist organization' (Article 282.3 § 1), however later the prosecution also added the 'organizing' charge, under Article 282.2 § 1.

Petro Zhiltsov was detained on 29 July 2021. He had earlier been interrogated as a 'witness' in the case against Kuzio, however the same 'investigator' – V.A. 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'. On that same date, Novikov also initiated charges of 'organizing an extremist organization', under Article 282.2 § 1 against Daria Kuzio; Serhiy Liulin and Tadevos Manukian (the charge against the latter appears to be in absentia).

[As reported](#), Liulin was seized by FSB officers in Russia on 11 August 2021. They forced him into the boot of a minivan and drove him, 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](#). He was released under house arrest on 1 March 2022.

There were three 'secret witnesses' in this case, despite the lack of any grounds for not revealing their identity. During the hearings, Taras Kuzio noted that these individuals, identified as 'Ivanov'; 'Petrov' and 'Volodin' – all gave identical 'testimony'. Although they were supposed to have attended services for more than a year, they claimed to not remember anybody except the defendants. The three all also said that they had shared the ideology of the Jehovah's Witnesses, however were unable to explain the faith's teachings, and, according to the JW.org report, could not even pronounce God's name correctly. It is assumed that they were in fact FSB agents. Russia standardly uses such anonymous 'witnesses' in persecuting Crimeans on political or religious grounds, with the 'judges' generally helping the prosecution by blocking questions aimed at demonstrating that these 'witnesses' are lying. This [has been condemned](#) by the UN Secretary General (in 2021) and the European Court of Human Rights [found in September 2020](#) that Russia had violated the right to a fair trial of three men because of the unwarranted use of 'secret witnesses' to convict them.

In June 2022, the European Court of Human Rights [belatedly issued a judgement](#), finding Russia's ban of the Jehovah's Witnesses to be unlawful and ordering, among other things, that Russia discontinue current proceedings and release those imprisoned for their faith. The judgement coincided with attempts by Moscow to backdate its withdrawal from the European Convention on Human Rights and, therefore, the Court. These attempts were unlawful, and the judgement is indisputably binding upon Russia. It is, however, being ignored, as are numerous other rulings by international courts and other bodies concerning all occupied parts of Ukraine.

A brief summary of other prosecutions of Jehovah's Witnesses [can be found here](#).

Photo: From left, clockwise Taras Kuzio, Serhiy Liulin, Petro Zhiltsov, Daria Kuzio Photos and montage from JW.org site

New legislation restricting missionary work breached the European Convention

[Registrar of the European Court](#) (07.03.2023) - In today's **Chamber** judgment¹ in the case of **Ossewaarde v. Russia** (application no. 27227/17) the European Court of Human Rights held, unanimously, that there had been:

a violation of Article 9 (freedom of religion) of the European Convention on Human Rights, and **a violation of Article 14 (prohibition of discrimination)** of the European Convention taken in conjunction with Article 9.

The case concerns a US national living in Russia, a Baptist Christian, who was fined for holding Bible study meetings in his home without notifying the authorities.

The sanction was imposed on the applicant following new legal requirements for missionary work introduced in Russia in 2016 as part of an anti-terrorism package. The new legislation made it an offence to evangelise in private homes and required prior authorisation for missionary work from a religious group or organisation.

The Court found in particular that the Government had not explained the rationale behind such new formalities for missionary work which had left no room for people engaged in individual evangelism, such as the applicant. There was no evidence that the applicant had used any improper methods of proselytism, involving coercion or incitement to hatred or intolerance.

A legal summary of this case will be available in the Court's database HUDOC ([link](#)).

Principal facts

The applicant, Donald Jay Ossewaarde, is a national of the United States of America who was born in 1960. He lived in Oryol (Russia) and had a permanent residence permit.

The applicant and his wife are Baptist Christians. Since moving to Oryol in 2005 they regularly held prayer and Bible study meetings in their home. Mr Ossewaarde personally invited people to the meetings and posted information about them on notice boards.

Against the background of newly adopted legislation concerning missionary work, three police officers turned up at the couple's home on 14 August 2016 during a Sunday meeting. After the Bible study, the officers took statements from those present and then escorted Mr Ossewaarde to the local police station.

At the police station he had his fingerprints taken and was shown a letter of complaint about evangelical tracts being posted on the notice board in the entrance of an apartment building. The police drew up an administrative offence report for conducting illegal missionary work as a non- Russian national.

He was then taken directly to court for a short hearing before being convicted of carrying out missionary work without notifying the authorities of the establishment of a religious group. He was fined 40,000 roubles (approximately 650 euros at the time).

His conviction was upheld on appeal in a summary fashion. His additional requests for review of the conviction were all ultimately rejected.

Complaints, procedure and composition of the Court

Relying in particular on Article 9 (freedom of religion), Mr Ossewaarde complained about being fined for preaching Baptism under the new legislation, arguing that he had not been a member of any religious association but had been exercising his right to spread his personal religious convictions. He also complained under Article 14 (prohibition of

discrimination) in conjunction with Article 9 about discrimination on account of nationality because, as a US national, he was given a higher fine than a Russian national.

The application was lodged with the European Court of Human Rights on 30 March 2017.

The European Association of Jehovah's Christian Witnesses was granted leave to intervene as a third party.

The Court's procedure for processing of applications against Russia can be found [here](#). Judgment was given by a Chamber of seven judges, composed as follows:

Pere **Pastor Vilanova** (Andorra), *President*, Georgios A. **Serghides** (Cyprus),
Yonko **Grozev** (Bulgaria),
Jolien **Schukking** (the Netherlands), Darian **Pavli** (Albania),

Ioannis **Ktistakis** (Greece), Andreas **Zünd** (Switzerland),

and also Olga **Chernishova**, *Deputy Section Registrar*.

Decision of the Court

The Court established that it had jurisdiction to deal with the case, as the facts giving rise to the alleged violations of the Convention had taken place before 16 September 2022, the date on which Russia ceased to be a Party to the European Convention.

Article 9 (freedom of religion)

The Court reiterated that the act of imparting information about a particular set of beliefs to others who do not hold those beliefs – known as missionary work or evangelism in Christianity – was protected under Article 9. In particular, when there had been no evidence of coercion or improper pressure, the Court had previously affirmed the right to engage in individual evangelism and door- to-door preaching.

It noted that there was no evidence that Mr Ossewaarde had made anyone participate in his religious meetings against their will or that he had sought to incite hatred, discrimination or intolerance. He had thus been sanctioned not for any improper methods of proselytism but solely for failing to comply with the new legal requirements applicable to missionary work which had been introduced in 2016.

The Court found that the new requirements – making it an offence to evangelise in private homes and requiring prior authorisation for missionary work from a religious group or organisation – had left no room for people engaged in individual evangelism, such as the applicant.

The Government had not explained the rationale behind such new formalities for missionary work. The Court was not therefore convinced that the interference with the applicant's right to freedom of religion on account of his missionary activities had pursued any "pressing social need".

Moreover, sanctioning the applicant for his alleged failure to inform the authorities of the establishment of a religious group had not been "necessary in a democratic society". The freedom to manifest one's beliefs and to talk to others about them, could not be made conditional on any acts of State approval or administrative registration; to do so would amount to accepting that a State could dictate what a person had to believe.

There had accordingly been a violation of Article 9 of the Convention.

Article 14 (prohibition of discrimination) in conjunction with Article 9

The Court noted that, under the Code of Administrative Offences, the minimum fine for a non-national found guilty of an offence of illegal missionary work was six times higher than for a Russian national. Non-nationals were also liable to expulsion. There was therefore a difference in treatment of persons in an analogous situation on the grounds of their nationality.

The Court found no justification for such difference in treatment, which was also hard to reconcile with Russia's Religions Act providing that non-nationals lawfully present in Russia could exercise the right to freedom of religion in the same way as Russian nationals could.

There had accordingly been a violation of Article 14 of the Convention, taken in conjunction with Article 9.

Just satisfaction (Article 41)

The Court held that Russia was to pay the applicant 592 euros (EUR) in respect of pecuniary damage, EUR 10,000 in respect of non-pecuniary damage and EUR 4,000 in respect of costs and expenses.

The judgment is available only in English.

Religious persecution and issues – Bimonthly digest Feb 16-28

03.03.2023 - Court' in Russian-occupied Crimea passes long sentences against three Ukrainian Jehovah's Witnesses

Khpg - The Russian occupation 'Yalta municipal court' has convicted four Jehovah's Witnesses of preposterous charges based solely on the Ukrainians' faith, with three men sentenced to long terms of imprisonment. Instead of complying with international law which prohibits an occupying state from applying its legislation on occupied territory, Russia's religious persecution in occupied Crimea is worse even than that on Russian territory. If in Russia, 'judges' do fairly often pass suspended sentences, virtually all 'trials' in occupied Crimea have ended in terms of imprisonment of between 6 and 7 years.

[Continue reading...](#)

27.02.2023 - Jehovah's Witnesses from Yalta sentenced

Sova center - On February 27, 2023, the Yalta City Court sentenced four local Jehovah's Witnesses. **Taras Kuzio** was sentenced to six and a half years in prison in a penal colony with restriction of freedom for a year. **Sergei Lyulin and Petr Zhiltsov** each received six years and one month in prison and a year of restriction of freedom. The court sentenced Darya Kuzio to three years of suspended liberty with the same probationary period.

[Continue reading...](#)

24.02.2023 - In Saransk, a new wave of searches at Jehovah's Witnesses. Three believers arrested

Link to full text in Russian : <https://jw-russia.org/news/2023/02/241011.html>

Early in the morning of February 14, 2023, law enforcement officers in Saransk conducted at least ten searches in the homes of believers who are suspected of practicing the religion of Jehovah's Witnesses. It is known that **Mikhail Shevchuk, Artem Velichko** and **Ivan Neverov** were sent to Detention Center No. 1 in the Republic of Mordovia.

On January 11, 2023, the investigator of the Ministry of Internal Affairs V. A. Makeeva opened a criminal case against three local residents. In the friendly meetings of believers, she saw a crime—"organizing the activities of an extremist organization" (part 1 of article 282.2 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation). Investigator K. I. Frantsuzov is handling the case. On February 3, he received court permission to conduct searches in the region.

[Continue reading...](#)

22.02.2023 - Aleksandr Shcherbina released. For his faith, he spent 2 years in a colony

Link to full text in Russian : <https://jw-russia.org/news/2023/02/220913.html>

On February 22, 2023, **Aleksandr Shcherbina** was released after serving his full term of imprisonment for his belief in Jehovah God. Earlier, the appeal commuted his sentence, reducing the period of stay in the colony from three years to two.

Shcherbina faced criminal prosecution in 2020, when homes of Jehovah's Witnesses were searched in the villages of the Krasnodar Territory. The accusation of extremism was followed by 2 months of litigation. As a result, the believer received a real term of imprisonment in a general regime colony only because of his religion.

[Continue reading...](#)

22.02.2023 - Andrey Andreyev, the last of the Kursk Jehovah's Witnesses convicted for their faith, released from the Colony

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2023/02/220915.html>

On February 22, 2023, to the applause of relatives and friends, **Andrey Andreyev** was released from a penal colony in Lipetsk. He served the complete term given by the court - 4.5 years - for his faith in Jehovah God.

About a hundred people waited for more than two hours at a temperature of -17 degrees to greet Andrey.

In fact, Andrey Andreyev spent 3 years, 4 months and 9 days behind bars. For most of this period, he was in a pre-trial detention center.

[Continue reading...](#)

21.02.2023 - Three Jehovah's Witnesses sentenced in Kazan. Believers received various terms of imprisonment

Link to full text in Russian : <https://jw-russia.org/news/2023/02/210917.html>

On February 20, 2023, the Vakhitovsky District Court of Kazan found **Tatyana Obizhestvit** and **the Bochkarevs** guilty of organizing the activities of an extremist community. None of those convicted pleaded guilty.

Tatyana Obizhestvit and Leysan Bochkareva received suspended sentences of 2 and 2 and a half years, respectively. Andrey Bochkarev was sentenced to 3 years and 1 month of real imprisonment, but he was released in the courtroom, since he has actually served his term in a pre-trial detention center.

[Continue reading...](#)

21.02.2023 - State Prosecutor requests eight years in Prison for a Jehovah's Witness from the Krasnoyarsk Territory

Sova Center - **Yuri Yakovlev** is accused of organizing the activities of a banned organization.

On February 17, 2023, during a debate in the Sosnovoborsk City Court of the Krasnoyarsk Territory, the state prosecutor asked that Jehovah's Witness Yury Yakovlev be sentenced to eight years in a penal colony.

The believer is accused under Part 1 of Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code (organization of the activities of an extremist organization). A criminal case was opened against him on March 28, 2022 — on that day, searches were conducted in five homes of Jehovah's Witnesses in Sosnovoborsk, and Yakovlev was detained. Two days later, the court sent him to jail. According to investigators, he organized online meetings of the community, was engaged in "pastoral work" and supervised "preaching activities." In June 2022, the case of a Jehovah's Witness came to court for consideration on the merits.

[Continue reading...](#)

20.02.2023 - Jehovah's Witnesses detained in Leningrad Region

Sova Center - On February 20, 2023, the investigative department of the Russian Investigative Committee for the Leningrad Region announced the detention of six Jehovah's Witnesses as part of an investigation into a case initiated under Part 1 of Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code (organization of the activities of an extremist organization).

According to investigators, in April 2017, in the Kingisepp District, a local resident born in 1989, whose name is not named, organized "propaganda meetings with the participation of adherents via video link and at their places of residence, at which forbidden literature

and methods of its distribution were studied and discussed" , and also "performed managerial functions aimed at supporting the activities of a religious organization, including those related to the collection of donations." Five other detainees were members of the organization, the UK believes.

[Continue reading...](#)

20.02.2023 - Court passes judgment on Jehovah's Witnesses from Kazan

Sova Center - Andrei Bochkarev received a real term, but was immediately released. Leysan Bochkareva and Tatyana Obijestvit were sentenced to suspended sentences.

On February 20, 2023, the Vakhitovsky District Court of Kazan passed a sentence on Jehovah's Witnesses, who were accused of organizing the activities of an extremist organization (Part 1, Article 282.2 of the Criminal Code). Andrei Bochkarev was sentenced by the court to three years and a month in prison to be served in a strict regime colony, but he was immediately released: Bochkarev was credited with the time he spent in custody during the investigation. His wife Leysan Bochkareva received a two and a half year suspended sentence with a probationary period of the same duration, and Tatyana Obijestvit received two years suspended sentence with a two-year probationary period.

[Continue reading...](#)

16.02.2023 - Court in Kazan gave Konstantin Sannikov, a father of four, 6.5 years in a Penal Colony for reading the Bible

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2023/02/161447.html>

On February 15, 2023, the Sovetskiy District Court of Kazan sentenced **Konstantin Sannikov** to 6.5 years in a penal colony. For conducting peaceful religious services of Jehovah's Witnesses, the court found him guilty of extremism.

Several secret witnesses testified in the Sannikov case. According to the defense, their statements did not correspond to reality and indicated personal hostility toward Jehovah's Witnesses. Also Judge Marat Khaertdinov noticed this: at one of the hearings he stated that the witness was clearly trying to slander the defendant.

[Continue reading...](#)

16.02.2023 - New raids in the Khabarovsk Territory. Criminal case initiated against a 76-year-old believer

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2023/02/160909.html>

On February 13, 2023, in the village of Dormidontovka, Khabarovsk Territory, police conducted at least two searches and interrogations of persons suspected of practicing the religion of Jehovah's Witnesses. A day earlier, a criminal case was opened against 76-year-old Liliya Dolinina.

At 6:00 am, operatives broke into the homes of elderly believers to conduct searches that lasted 4 hours. Electronic devices, computer storage media and personal records were confiscated from Liliya Dolinina and another man. After the searches, the believers

were taken to the investigative committee for interrogation, where they were tried to find out who else in the village professes the religion of Jehovah's Witnesses and organizes worship meetings.

[Continue reading...](#)

16.02.2023 - 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" .

The decision of the court has not yet entered into force, the defense intends to appeal it. Lawyer Ivan Khoroshev, who represents the interests of the Church, believes that the conclusion of the expert examination, on which the court relied, was prepared "in gross violation of the law." In particular, the examination was carried out outside a state institution and without the appointment of experts by the court: "The procedure for initiating a specialist as an expert has been violated. If the procedure is violated, then the experts are not legally responsible for their conclusions. The entire judicial practice of administrative proceedings suggests that such examinations cannot be recognized as admissible .

[Continue reading...](#)

Russia to pay about 350,000 EUR to Jehovah's Witnesses for disrupting their religious meetings

[European Times](#) (24.02.2023) – Jehovah's Witnesses Russia (03.02.2023) - On January 31, 2023, the European Court of Human Rights, having considered seven complaints from Jehovah's Witnesses from Russia, recognized the disruption of worship services from 2010 to 2014 as a violation of fundamental freedoms. The ECHR ruled to pay compensation to the applicants in the amount of 345,773 EUR and another 5,000 EUR as legal costs.

What Happened?

This case concerns the disruption of religious meetings in 17 regions of Russia, as well as searches, confiscation of literature and personal belongings, and several cases of detention with personal searches.

Law enforcement officers, sometimes armed and wearing masks, would brake into the buildings where worship services of Jehovah's Witnesses were being conducted. The actions of law enforcement officers were justified by technicalities, for example, by the fact that the meetings were organized without prior notice to the authorities. The security forces either demanded that the event be stopped or remained on the premises and

filmed what was happening using photo and video equipment, after which they interrogated those present.

On several occasions, police raided places of worship, including private residences. The search warrants did not provide specific grounds. They only stated that the buildings may contain "evidence relevant to the criminal case."

"The applicants unsuccessfully pleaded with [the police] to postpone the search until after the end of the religious services." Several similar cases are described in the ECHR decision (§ 4).

The victims appealed against the actions of the security forces in local courts, but their demands were not satisfied.

ECHR Decision

The European Court concluded that the actions of the Russian authorities violated Article 9 of the Convention on Human Rights, which declares the fundamental right to participate in peaceful religious assemblies.

Here are excerpts from the judgment of the ECHR.

"The disruption of a religious assembly by the authorities and sanctioning of the applicants for holding 'unauthorized' religious events amounts to 'interference by a public authority' with the applicants' right to manifest their religion." (§ 9)

"The Court has previously noted the consistent case-law of Russia's Supreme Court that religious meetings, even those conducted on rented premises, did not require prior authorization from, or notice to, the authorities . . . [the applicants'] conviction did not have a clear . . . legal basis and was not 'prescribed by law.'" (§ 10)

"It is undisputed that all religious assemblies were peaceful in their nature and were not likely to cause any disturbance or danger to the public order. Their disruption . . . did not pursue a 'pressing social need' and therefore not 'necessary in a democratic society.'" (§·11)

"The Court finds that the search warrants had been couched in extremely broad terms . . . They did not specify why the particular premises were targeted, what it was that the police expected to find there and what relevant and sufficient reasons justified the need to conduct the search." (§·12)

What Does the Decision of the European Court Mean?

Although the cases reviewed by the ECHR dealt with events prior to the ban on Russian legal entities of Jehovah's Witnesses in 2017, hundreds of criminal cases filed since then have treated the joint discussion of the Holy Scriptures as a crime.

Yaroslav Sivulskiy, representative of the European Association of Jehovah's Witnesses, commented on the decision of the ECHR: "The ECHR once again emphasized that there is not and cannot be anything extremist in the religious meetings of Jehovah's Witnesses. The same was recognized by the [Plenum of the Supreme Court of Russia](#); however, some Russian courts continue to act contrary to these rulings, [putting Jehovah's Witnesses behind bars](#) merely because of their religion."

More than 60 applications from those who suffered from the repressive campaign against Russian Jehovah's Witnesses are awaiting the European Court's decision.

In June 2022, the European Court of Human Rights recognized [the liquidation](#) of legal entities of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia as illegal and [demanded](#) that the criminal prosecution of believers be stopped and that all those imprisoned for their faith be released.

Religious persecution and issues – Bimonthly digest Feb 01-15

14.02.2023 - Two Catholic priests expelled from Russia

Sova Center - On January 21, it became known about the disappearance of the rector of the Belgorod Catholic parish, priest Mark Bakezhinski, a citizen of Poland. Later it became known that he was detained by law enforcement agencies. January 24 Belgorod District Court under Part 1 of Art. 20.1 of the Code of Administrative Offenses (petty hooliganism) sentenced him to seven days of arrest for allegedly arranged by him on the morning of January 22, when he was supposed to prepare for the liturgy, "a scandal in a public place, during which he expressed rude obscene language, did not react to comments to stop hooligan actions , which violated public order and expressed a clear disrespect for society.

[Continue reading...](#)

10.02.2023 - Fled fearing prosecution for preaching that war is "terrible"

A Russian Orthodox (Moscow Patriarchate) priest has been forced to leave Russia for fear of criminal prosecution over his opposition to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Fr Aleksandr Dombrovsky, from Bryansk Region, went abroad in January, shortly after police told him that the Federal Security Service (FSB) had opened a case against him. He had repeatedly preached against the war in Ukraine in his sermons. "Everything related to my anti-war position was recorded in a most thorough manner," he told Forum 18.

[Continue reading...](#)

09.02.2023 - In Moscow, a native of Chechnya was banned from wearing a hijab in the office

Sova Center - On February 7, 2023, it became known that the management forbade Aminat Kantaeva, an employee of one of the Moscow private organizations, to wear a headscarf in the workplace.

Kantaeva, a native of Chechnya, complained to the Commissioner for Human Rights in this republic, Mansur Soltaev. He, in a telephone conversation with the head of the department where Kantaeva works, found out the reason for such a requirement: according to the employer, the scarf "scars away customers" who come to the office.

The CEO of the company promised to resolve this issue in the near future.

09.02.2023 - Court in Mezhdurechensk refuses to ban Falun Dafa founder's books

The decision was made in November 2022. The prosecutor's office decided to appeal it.

On November 9, 2022, the Mezhdurechensk City Court of the Kemerovo Region dismissed an administrative claim by the prosecutor's office to recognize the books "Falun Dafa. The essence of diligent cultivation. I-II" and "Falun Dafa. The essence of diligent cultivation. III" by Li Hongzhi. On February 2, 2023, the Kemerovo Regional Court received an appeal from the prosecutor against this decision, and its consideration is scheduled for March 2.

[Continue reading...](#)

06.02.2023 - In St. Petersburg, a criminal case was opened against a former priest about "fakes" about the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation

Sova Center - On June 8, 2022, it became known that a criminal case had been opened in St. Petersburg under paragraph "e", part 2 of Art. 207.3 of the Criminal Code (public dissemination under the guise of reliable reports of knowingly false information containing data on 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) in regarding the former priest John (Dmitry) Kurmoyarov.

[Continue reading...](#)

06.02.2023 - Publisher Ezhaev sentenced to 17 years in prison

On February 3, 2023, the Second Western District Military Court found the head of the Umma publishing house, Aslambek Ezhaev, guilty under Part 4 of Art. 205.1 of the Criminal Code (organization organization of financing of terrorist activities) and sentenced him to 17 years in prison.

[Continue reading...](#)

05.02.2023 - Ouster of Buddhist leader in Kalmykia likely to make that Republic a new headache for the Kremlin

The Kremlin may have felt it had no choice to push for the ouster of the long-time Buddhist leader of Kalmykia given his criticism of Moscow's war in Ukraine, China's unhappiness with a Buddhist leader in Russia so close to the Dalai Lama and the Kalmyk political leadership's desire to have its own man in that position.

[Continue reading...](#)

03.02.2023 - In Kamchatka, another foreign citizen fined for "illegal" missionary work

Sova Center - On January 20, 2023, the Elizovsky District Court of the Kamchatka Territory found the foreign citizen **Abdulmashit Abduvaliev** guilty under Part 5 of Art. 5.26 of the Code of Administrative Offenses (implementation by a foreign citizen of missionary activity in violation of the requirements of the law) and fined him 30 thousand rubles.

According to the court, he, being in the temporary detention center for foreign citizens of the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs for the Kamchatka Territory, "conducted religious ceremonies with the participation of at least 10-12 persons", without permits and not belonging to any religious organization. Abduvaliev admitted guilt.

03.02.2023 - The ECtHR has published a decision on the complaint against the ban on the magazines "Zvezda Selenny" and the Novosibirsk organization "Allya-Ayat"

The European Court considered that the right of the leader of the Novosibirsk group "Allya-Ayat" Valery Milshtein to freedom of religion, freedom of expression and freedom of association was violated.

On January 31, 2023, the European Court of Human Rights published the decision rendered on January 10 on application No. 1377/14 Milstein v. Russia. Valery Milshtein, a resident of Novosibirsk, appealed against the decision to ban publications and activities of adherents of the Alla-Ayat (Elle-Ayat) sun-worshipping movement, which preaches the treatment of all diseases through nature-related rites.

[Continue reading...](#)

02.02.2023 - ECtHR decides to pay compensation to Jehovah's Witnesses for disrupted services

On January 31, 2023, the European Court of Human Rights ruled in the Nabokikh and Others v. Russia case, which brought together the complaints of several Jehovah's Witnesses whose religious meetings in 18 Russian regions were disrupted by security forces in 2010-2013.

We are talking about the cases "Nabokikh and others against Russia" (Kirov, Volgograd, Prokhladny, Vladimir, Ufa), "Martynenko and others against Russia" (Yoshkar-Ola), "Zinchenko and others against Russia" (Smolensk, Perm, Kazan, Kaliningrad, Voronezh, Belgorod, Blagoveshchensk), Burenkov and Others v. Russia (Salekhard), Golovko and Others v. Russia (Kemerovo), Shaikhiev and Others v. Russia (Naberezhnye Chelny, Dubna), Mashinsky and Others v. Russia" (Primorsky Territory).

[Continue reading...](#)

02.02.2023 - ECtHR rules on complaint against ban on Zhuan Falun and three other Falun Gong materials

The European Court held that the ban on Falun Gong materials violated Art. 9 and 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights, guaranteeing the right to freedom of expression and freedom of religion.

On January 31, 2023, the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) published a ruling on the complaints of the followers of the spiritual movement "Falun Gong" Mikhail Sinitsyn and Sergey Alekhin on the recognition of four materials of the movement as extremist materials. The applicants pointed out that their rights guaranteed by Art. 9 and 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights - on freedom of religion and freedom of expression.

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OCCUPIED UKRAINE: "Disappeared" clergy, seized places of worship, library purge

Felix Corley, [Forum 18](#)

[Forum18](#) (03.02.2023) - Russian occupation authorities continue to violate freedom of religion and belief in the Ukrainian territory they currently control. In late 2022 two Greek Catholic priests and a Protestant pastor were the latest known religious leaders seized by occupation authorities, and it is unknown where they are or even if they are still alive. [UPDATE: Russian military seized Orthodox priest Platon Danyshchuk on 26 January.] Raids on and seizures of places of worship continued in January 2023, and a purge of "extremist" books from educational libraries was ordered in Luhansk.

Russian restrictions on freedom of religion and belief and other human rights are being illegally imposed on Russian-occupied Ukrainian territory in a more systematic way since Russia's claimed annexation in October 2022 of further Ukrainian territory. "Since October we are now part of Russia. The situation is different," Oleg Pomnikov of the Religious and Ethnic Affairs Department of the Luhansk People's Republic (LPR) Culture, Sport and Youth Ministry insisted to Forum 18 on 1 February.



Fr Bohdan Heleta (left) and Fr Ivan Levytsky, Church of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin, Berdyansk [Donetsk Exarchate](#)

The whereabouts, conditions of captivity, and state of health of three religious leaders from occupied Berdyansk remain unknown. Russia's National Guard (Rosgvardiya) seized two Ukrainian Greek Catholic priests, Fr Ivan Levytsky and Fr Bohdan Heleta, on 16 November 2022. Armed Russian soldiers seized Serhiy Karpenko, Pastor of the Vefil (Bethel) Protestant Church, on 12 December 2022. The Russian-controlled Berdyansk District Police did not answer Forum 18's questions. The duty officer at the Russian Military Command in Melitopol refused to discuss anything with Forum 18 or give any number for the Military Command in Berdyansk (see below).

In January, the Russian military broke into a Sunday worship meeting of a Baptist church in the occupied Ukrainian town of Berdyansk in Zaporizhzhia Region. The military checked the identity of all those present, searched the building and sealed it, taking the keys. The following day they seized another Baptist church in the town. The duty officer at the Russian Military Command in Melitopol refused to discuss anything with Forum 18, refused to give any number for the Military Command in Berdyansk and put the phone down (see below).

[UPDATE 6 February 2023: On 26 January, the Russian military seized Fr Platon Danyshchuk, Orthodox Church of Ukraine priest of Holy Trinity Church in the village of Dobropillya in occupied Kherson Region, Fr Ioan Zamarayev of the OCU's Kherson Diocese confirmed on 5 February.]

In Russian-occupied Kherson Region in January, the Russian Regional Police conducted at least two raids on Jehovah's Witness Kingdom Halls, even though they have been empty since the start of the coronavirus pandemic in early 2020. Russian police seized religious literature which they described as "extremist", noting that that Jehovah's Witnesses are banned in Russia. The police stressed that anyone continuing the activity of a religious community Russia has banned risks long jail terms under Russia's Criminal Code (see below).

The occupation authorities' Kherson Police described Jehovah's Witnesses as conducting "destructive" activity and "propagandising anti-Orthodox ideas, spreading extremist literature and rejecting the entry of the region into Russia" (see below).

In occupied Luhansk, in January 2023 the Russian military seized a Baptist church that the community has been banned by occupation authorities from using since 2017. Oleg Pomnikov, head of the Religious and Ethnic Affairs Department of the LPR Culture, Sport and Youth Ministry, questioned whether the building is a church. "I looked at the records and there is no registered Baptist organisation in Luhansk," he told Forum 18 (see below).

Pomnikov claimed that the absence of registered Protestant, non-Moscow Patriarchate Orthodox, and Jehovah's Witness communities in the LPR "reflects the local population," he claimed (see below).

Pomnikov of the LPR's of the Religious and Ethnic Affairs Department insisted that anyone who wants to meet for worship legally is able to do so. He said the LPR attitude to religious communities has, since October 2022, been strictly governed by Russian Federation laws, including the Religion Law (see below).

Pomnikov claimed to sympathise with the Roman Catholic parish in Luhansk, which has been without a priest since its parish priest Fr Grzegorz Rapa, a Polish citizen, left temporarily in March 2020 and was then repeatedly blocked by the LPR from returning. Fr Rapa had served the parish since 1993. "I'm very sad that they can't resolve their problems," Pomnikov claimed to Forum 18. He insisted that if Fr Rapa wants to return, he must apply to the Russian Foreign Ministry (see below).

The LPR is following the neighbouring Donetsk People's Republic (DPR) by purging their libraries of literature they and the Russian occupation authorities regard as "extremist".

On 20 January, the LPR Education and Science Ministry instructed the heads of educational establishments to remove "literature of an extremist nature, expressing the ideology of Ukrainian nationalism" from their libraries by 24 January. Educational establishment heads who failed to do so would bear personal responsibility, they were warned. Yelena Bakhmut, the official who prepared the letter, refused to discuss it with Forum 18 (see below).

The books to be removed include two on Metropolitan Andrey Sheptytsky (who headed the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church until his death in 1944) and one on St Petro Mohyla, a 17th century Orthodox Metropolitan of Kyiv known for his educational and publishing activities (see below).

Russian restrictions on freedom of religion or belief imposed on occupied Ukraine

Freedom of religion or belief violations in the Ukrainian territories Russia has occupied since 2014 have not followed one pattern.

In occupied and illegally annexed [Crimea](#) the Russian government has forcibly imposed Russian laws and restrictions on exercising human rights, including freedom of religion or belief.

In the occupied parts of the eastern Ukrainian territories of [Luhansk](#) (under the Russian-created Luhansk People's Republic - LPR) and [Donetsk](#) (under the Russian-created Donetsk People's Republic - LPR) serious violations of freedom of religion and belief and other human rights have also taken place since 2014.

Russia's February 2022 renewed invasion of Ukraine saw more Ukrainian territories brought under Russian occupation. As of early February 2023, Russia controls about 17 per cent of Ukrainian territory:

- 100 per cent of Crimea (including Sevastopol);
 - almost all of Luhansk Region;
 - about 60 per cent of Donetsk Region;
 - about 70 per cent of Zaporizhzhia Region;
 - about 70 per cent of Kherson Region;
- and small parts of Mykolaiv and Kharkiv Regions.

On 5 October 2022, following referenda that were widely denounced by the international community, Russia illegally annexed the DPR and LPR, retaining these names, along with Ukraine's Zaporizhzhia and Kherson Regions. "The so-called 'referenda' in Ukraine were conducted in areas under Russian occupation," United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres said on Twitter on 29 September 2022. "They can't be called a genuine expression of the popular will."

In 2023, Russia is now following a more coordinated approach to impose the full range of [Russian restrictions on the exercise of freedom of religion or belief across all the Russian-occupied areas of Ukraine](#).

Unlawful application of Russian law to occupied Ukrainian territory

Russian occupation officials in 2023 now insist that Russian law applies to the occupied territories, and that religious communities must have registration under Russian law.

The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) has condemned "the unlawful application of Russian Federation legislation by the occupation authorities of the Russian Federation in the occupied territory [Crimea]" in its [Report on the human rights situation in Ukraine for 1 August 2020 to 31 January 2021](#).

Under the [Geneva Convention \(IV\) relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War](#) (2nd part), occupation authorities must [must respect the laws in force](#) in the country (Ukraine) "unless absolutely prevented".

Article 58 notes: "The Occupying Power shall permit ministers of religion to give spiritual assistance to the members of their religious communities."

Russia was in December 2022, against international law, passing a law giving its officials and military [impunity from prosecution](#) for crimes if acting "in the interests of the Russian Federation", also denying justice to those who have been unlawfully prosecuted by occupation authorities.

Occupation officials also say that any exercise of freedom of religion or belief not permitted [is punishable under Russia's Criminal or Administrative Codes](#).

Berdiansk: "Disappeared" clergy still "disappeared"

One Protestant pastor and two Ukrainian Greek Catholic priests [seized in Berdiansk in late 2022](#) possibly remain in Russian detention, but it is unknown whether they are still alive.

Russian forces have [seized many leaders of a variety of religious communities](#) in the Ukrainian territory they occupy. In most of these cases, however, [it remains unclear if religious leaders were targeted](#) to specifically punish the exercise of the freedom of religion or belief.

On 16 November 2022, troops of Russia's National Guard (Rosgvardiya) [seized the two Ukrainian Greek Catholic priests, Fr Ivan Levytsky and Fr Bohdan Heleta](#), in Berdyansk. The Donetsk Exarchate has had no news of them since, it told Forum 18 on 2 February 2023.



Tatyana and Leonid Ponomaryov Private [CC BY-NC-ND 4.0]

On 12 December 2022, armed Russian soldiers [seized Serhiy Karpenko](#), Pastor of the Vefil (Bethel) Protestant Church, in Berdyansk.

Forum 18 has not been able to find out where Fr Levytsky, Fr Heleta, or Pastor Karpenko have been held, what their state of health is, or whether they have been released at an unknown location.

Officers of Berdyansk District's Russian-imposed police did not answer the phone each time Forum 18 called on 1 February. Forum 18 asked in writing that morning where Fr Levytsky, Fr Heleta and Pastor Karpenko are, why they have not been freed and whether they are still alive. Forum 18 had received no reply by the end of the working day in Berdyansk of 3 February.

The duty officer at the Russian Military Command for Zaporizhzhia Region in Melitopol refused to discuss anything with Forum 18 on 1 February, refused to give any number for the Military Command in Berdyansk and put the phone down.

Among other religious leaders detained by Russia in occupied territory, on 21 September 2022 masked Russian soldiers took from their home in Mariupol Leonid Ponomaryov, Pastor of a Baptist Council of Churches congregation in the city, and his wife Tatyana. They were [in Donetsk on 21 October 2022](#).

On 22 November 2022, the Russian military seized businessman and Pentecostal deacon 52-year-old Anatoly Prokopchuk and his 19-year-old son Aleksandr Prokopchuk, who lived in Nova Kakhovka in Kherson Region. On 26 November 2022, their shot and mutilated bodies [were found in a nearby wood](#).

Berdyansk: Baptist churches closed and sealed



Second Baptist Church, Berdyansk, 2021 Private [[CC BY-NC-ND 4.0](#)]

Also in Berdyansk, in January 2023 the Russian military closed two Ukrainian Baptist Union churches which had been able to continue to function up till that point.

On 22 January the Russian military burst into the Sunday worship service of the First Baptist Church in Berdyansk. They inspected the identity documents of each person present and searched the building. They then forced everyone outside and sealed the building, taking the keys, Ukraine's Baptist Union noted the next day. On 23 January, the Russian military summoned the church's pastor to the military headquarters.

The Baptist Church marked its 115th anniversary in September 2022, the Baptist Union said.

On 23 January, Russian occupation forces closed the Second Baptist Church in Berdyansk. "The demands were the same – to renounce Ukrainian registration and to register with the occupation administration," Ukraine's Baptist Union noted the same day.

A Baptist familiar with the situation told Forum 18 that a church member had come to the church that day and found Russian soldiers conducting a search. They seized documents and computers before sealing the building.

The duty officer at the Russian Military Command in Melitopol refused to discuss anything with Forum 18 on 1 February, refused to give any number for the Military Command in Berdyansk and put the phone down.

On 18 October 2022, the Russian military commandant of the town of [Chernihivka in Berdyansk District](#) took the keys of the Baptist Church and said that from now on the building is the property of the "administration". However, Baptists were allowed to continue meetings for worship.

Luhansk: Russian military seize closed Baptist church



Emmanuel Baptist Church, Luhansk [Butilkavodi/Wikimapia](#) [CC BY-SA 3.0]

At the end of January 2023, the Russian military seized the building of Emmanuel Baptist Church in Luhansk, the Ukrainian Baptist Union stated on 31 January. The congregation had not been able to use its church building since 2017, after the [enforced closure of all Protestant churches](#) in the Russian-controlled Luhansk People's Republic (LPR) in the years after the illegal entity's establishment in 2014.

"It's on LPR territory and it does not have registration," Oleg Pomnikov, the head of the Religious and Ethnic Affairs Department of the LPR Culture, Sport and Youth Ministry since autumn 2022, told Forum 18 from Luhansk on 1 February. He indicated that he had not heard of the seizure of Emmanuel Baptist Church, and asked Forum 18 for its address and said he would check.

"The building can't have been seized or confiscated – under Russian law this can't happen without a court order," Pomnikov insisted to Forum 18. He then questioned whether the building is a church. "I looked at the records and there is no registered Baptist organisation in Luhansk."

After the Russian-backed creation of the LPR in 2014, the LPR [banned all exercise of freedom of religion or belief without permission](#) from the entity's rulers. It also refused to register any Protestant churches – or communities of a range of other faiths, including the Orthodox Church of Ukraine and Jehovah's Witnesses.

Luhansk: "We are now part of Russia. The situation is different"

Oleg Pomnikov of the Religious and Ethnic Affairs Department of the LPR Culture, Sport and Youth Ministry insisted that anyone who wants to meet for worship legally is able to do so. He said the LPR attitude to religious communities has, since October 2022, been strictly governed by Russian Federation laws.

As of 3 February, 202 religious organisations in occupied Luhansk Region that had previously been registered by the Russian-backed LPR were registered with the Russian tax authorities. Almost all of these - 190 - are Russian Orthodox communities under the Moscow Patriarchate. Only 12 are from other communities: 8 Muslim; 1 Jewish; 1 Hare Krishna; 1 Old Believer; and 1 Roman Catholic.

Forum 18 asked Pomnikov why [no Baptist, Pentecostal, Seventh-day Adventist, Orthodox Church of Ukraine, Kyiv Patriarchate or Jehovah's Witness communities have been allowed to register](#). He replied: "There's one registered Buddhist community also." However, no Buddhist community appears on the Russian tax authorities' list of registered organisations.

Pomnikov of the LPR Religious and Ethnic Affairs Department claimed that the absence of registered Protestant, non-Moscow Patriarchate Orthodox and Jehovah's Witness communities "reflects the local population".

Many religious communities have [not been able to, or do not want to seek registration](#) under the LPR or – since 2022 – under Russian law. When Forum 18 asked what would happen to communities that meet without registration, Pomnikov replied: "They would consciously break the law if they are not registered. This is the law of the Russian Federation."

Pomnikov of the LPR Religious and Ethnic Affairs Department pointed to Article 9 of Russia's Religion Law, which imposes restrictive conditions for registration. Under Russian law, all unregistered groups must give the authorities full information about those who attend, meeting places, and activities.

Since the LPR was created in 2014 after Russia's invasion, LPR police have [raided meetings for worship](#) without LPR registration, and courts subsequently fined many religious leaders for leading those meetings. Protestants have been among those particularly targeted by such raids. When Forum 18 asked about this, Pomnikov responded: "I am not aware that the acts of the police were directed at people's religious activity. They were tackling violations of the law."

When Forum 18 listed some of the [fines on religious leaders](#) in recent years, Pomnikov responded: "Since October we are now part of Russia. The situation is different."

Kherson Region: Raids on empty Jehovah's Witness Kingdom Halls

The Russian Kherson Regional Police launched at least one criminal investigation and conducted at least two raids on Jehovah's Witness Kingdom Halls, even though they have not functioned since 2020. Jehovah's Witnesses across Ukraine stopped meeting in Kingdom Halls in early 2020 because of the coronavirus pandemic. Following the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, Kingdom Halls did not resume their activity in the regions occupied by Russia.

On 29 November 2022, Kherson Regional Police conducted "operational investigation measures" in the village of Krasne on the Black Sea coast which uncovered a group of Jehovah's Witnesses. Officers seized "banned" religious literature. They claim that the community was led by a 65-year-old individual.

Kherson Regional Police reminded readers of its Telegram channel that Russia had [banned all Jehovah's Witness activity](#) in 2017 – before Russia occupied Kherson. It also noted that under Russian Criminal Code Article 282.2, individuals can be [jailed for up to 10 years for organising the activity of an "extremist" religious community](#) and for up to 8 years for recruiting others to join such a community. The police said an investigation was underway.

Forum 18 understands that the 65-year-old individual is no longer in Russian-occupied territory.

On 23 January 2023, Kherson Police announced that they had raided the Kingdom Hall in

the village of Novosofiivka close to the southern Black Sea coast. Footage of the raid on the Police's Telegram channel showed officers searching the empty premises and finding boxes and cupboards of Jehovah's Witness literature.

The police report described Jehovah's Witnesses as conducting "destructive" activity and "propagandising anti-Orthodox ideas, spreading extremist literature and rejecting the entry of the region into Russia". The report added that officers had "established the identity of the leader and activists of the cell". It reminded readers that Russia had banned all Jehovah's Witness activity under "anti-extremism" legislation.

On 23 January, Kherson Police also announced that they had that day raided the Kingdom Hall in the village of Oleshky, close to the Dnipro River. They claimed the raid was part of "operational investigation measures to halt the underground activity of extremist organisations". The Police report said officers had seized 1,700 "extremist" books and magazine, a collection box and portable display stands.

Luhansk: Will Catholic priest be able to return?



Fr Grzegorz Rapa (left), Bishop Jan Sobilo, Archbishop Claudio Gugerotti, Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary Church, Luhansk, 17 February 2019 - [CREDO](#)

Oleg Pomnikov, the head of the Religious and Ethnic Affairs Department of the LPR Culture, Sport and Youth Ministry, claimed to sympathise with the Roman Catholic parish of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Luhansk and a smaller parish in Stakhanov [official Ukrainian name Kadiyevka]. The Luhansk parish had registration under the LPR and in November 2022 it was among the religious communities in the LPR whose registration the Russian authorities accepted.

The parishes have [had no priest since March 2020](#), when Fr Grzegorz Rapa left expecting to be able to return. However, LPR officials repeatedly rejected all his and his bishop's attempts to be allowed to return. Fr Rapa, a Polish priest, has served in Luhansk since 1993.

"I'm very sad that they can't resolve their problems," Pomnikov told Forum 18. "Maybe there's a political reason why Fr Grzegorz has not been able to return, I don't know. Maybe he hasn't asked to return. But there is no artificial obstruction."

Forum 18 pointed out that [the LPR authorities had repeatedly rejected attempts](#) since 2020 to get permission for Fr Rapa's return. Pomnikov of the LPR Religious and Ethnic

Affairs Department insisted that the situation is now different since the LPR's annexation by Russia. "If he wants to return he'll have to apply to the Foreign Ministry of the Russian Federation in accordance with Russian law."

Luhansk: Purge of educational establishment libraries

The LPR Education and Science Ministry has ordered a purge of libraries in educational establishments. On 20 January 2023, in a letter seen by Forum 18, acting minister Yevgeny Miroshnichenko instructed the heads of educational establishments to remove "literature of an extremist nature, expressing the ideology of Ukrainian nationalism" from their libraries.

The LPR had earlier [banned various texts as "extremist"](#), including in 2019 an edition of the Gospel of John in the widely-used Russian Synodal translation originally published in 1820.

Miroshnichenko of the LPR Education and Science Ministry supplied a list of 365 books to be removed. He also ordered libraries to remove a wide range of other literature, including anything about the holodomor (the Ukrainian famine in the 1930s caused by Stalin's policies), literature "propagandising European gender 'values'", literature on events in Ukraine since 2014, and all 90 books from Famous Ukrainians, a biographical series aimed at teenagers.

The Famous Ukrainians series includes a book on St Petro Mohyla, a 17th century Orthodox Metropolitan of Kyiv who was known for his educational and publishing activities, and a book on Metropolitan Andrey Sheptytsky. (Metropolitan Sheptytsky headed the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church until his death in 1944, and [protected Jews from the Holocaust](#) at a time when such acts were punishable by death.)

The list of "extremist" books to be removed also includes a book on Metropolitan Sheptytsky by the former Soviet prisoner of conscience Myroslav Marynovych. "I believe in God and in Ukraine", by the former Soviet prisoner of conscience and Orthodox Christian Levko Lukyanenko, is also on the "extremist" book list.

Miroshnichenko of the LPR Education and Science Ministry ordered libraries to remove all such "extremist" books and put them in sealed boxes, and report on this to the Ministry by 24 January. Educational establishment heads who failed to do so would bear personal responsibility, he warned.

Yelena Bakhmut, the official who prepared the letter for Miroshnichenko, refused to discuss it. "Put your questions in writing," she told Forum 18 from Luhansk on 2 February. When Forum 18 began asking why books on St Petro Mohyla and Metropolitan Sheptytsky were among those ordered removed from educational institutions libraries, she put the phone down.

The Russian-imposed LPR Culture Minister Dmitry Sidorov told a meeting chaired by Russia's Culture Minister Olga Lyubimova on 20 January that public libraries have already removed "extremist" literature.

Oleg Pomnikov, the head of the Religious and Ethnic Affairs Department of the LPR Culture, Sport and Youth Ministry, defended the removal from libraries of "extremist" books. "Sheptytsky was an active supporter of Nazism and of Ukrainian nationalism," he claimed to Forum 18. "The Greek Catholic Church supported the Banderists." He made no comment about St Petro Mohyla.

Natalya Rastorguyevka, director of the LPR's Gorky Universal Science Library, refused to

discuss the removal of works the LPR and Russian government regards as "extremist" from local libraries. "You can argue about this issue for a long time," she told Forum 18 from Luhansk on 1 February. "But any questions must be submitted through the Culture Ministry."

Rastorguyevka refused to say if her library has, for example, removed any religious works on Russia's [Federal List of Extremist Materials](#).

The neighbouring Donetsk People's Republic (DPR) has also conducted such a book purge. In May 2022 the DPR Culture Ministry began a programme of [removing from public libraries literature that it regards as "extremist"](#). These included not only books on Ukrainian culture and history and books about Adolf Hitler, but books on "political and religious figures".

Religious persecution and issues – Bimonthly digest Jan 16-31

31.01.2023 - The Court keeps an elderly believer from Maykop in a pre-trial detention Center for months.

Link to full text in Russian: <https://www.jw-russia.org/news/2023/01/311614.html>

On January 17, 2023, the Maykop City Court refused to release **Nikolay Voishchev**, a 67-year-old Jehovah's Witness from Maykop, from custody, where he has been held for more than 3 months only because of the faith of Jehovah's Witnesses. He will stay in the pre-trial detention center for at least another six months, despite the disease discovered in him.

[Continue reading...](#)

29.01.2023 - The Supreme Lama of Kalmykia left his post after being declared a "foreign agent"

Kasparov.ru - Honorary Representative of the Dalai Lama in Russia, Mongolia and CIS countries Telo Tulku Rinpoche (Erdni Ombadykov) decided to leave the post of the supreme lama of Kalmykia after the Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation declared him a "foreign agent". This is stated in his address on the website of the Central Khurul of the Republic.

"I wish the people of Kalmykia and all followers of Buddhism in these difficult times to maintain courage, fortitude and commitment to the ideals of compassion, love and non-violence on which our Buddha Teachings is based," the statement reads.

The Supreme Lama of Kalmykia handed over powers to the rector of the Kalmyk Central Buddhist monastery "Geden Sheddup Choi Korling" Geshe Tenjin Choydak (Mutul Ovyanov) and the administrator of the gelong Yonten Lodoy (Sergey Kirishov).

25.01.2023 - A Court in the Kemerovo Region sentenced a labor veteran to 6 years of suspended term for reading the Bible with friends

Link to full text in Russian: <https://www.jw-russia.org/news/2023/01/251425.html>

On January 24, 2023, the judge of the Kuznetsk District Court of Novokuznetsk (Kemerovo Region) Anton Iordan found the 65-year-old labor veteran guilty of extremism because of his religious views.

Sergey Sushilnikov and his wife have been living in Novokuznetsk for over 40 years. During this time, he repeatedly received certificates of honor and awards from the city administration and his employers. He has the title of labor veteran.

[Continue reading...](#)

24.01.2023 - Two trials, nine long jail terms

Eight of nine Jehovah's Witnesses convicted on "extremism"-related charges in two trials in Russia's Far East in December 2022 received jail terms of 6 to 7 years. An Amur Region Prosecutor's Office official justified the jailings: "Any missionary activity of members of a religious organisation liquidated by a court in connection with repeated violations of the law on countering extremist activity will be illegal in nature and subject to liability established by law." The 9 were among 124 Jehovah's Witnesses criminally convicted in 2022. Trials continue.

In two trials in mid-December 2022, two courts in Russia's Far East sentenced a total of 9 Jehovah's Witnesses to long jail terms. All but one received jail terms of between 6 and 7 years. The 9 men were among 19 Jehovah's Witnesses to receive general-regime prison terms in the last quarter of 2022.

[Continue reading...](#)

23.01.2023 - The Court of Cassation upheld the sentence of four believers from Volgograd.

Link to full text in Russian: <https://www.jw-russia.org/news/2023/01/231338.html>

On January 19, 2023, the Fourth General Jurisdiction Court of Cassation in Krasnodar did not change the guilty verdict and appeal ruling in the case of **Valeriy Rogozin, Igor Egozaryan, Sergey Melnik and Denis Peresunko**, who were sentenced to long terms for their faith as Jehovah's Witnesses.

[Continue reading...](#)

21.01.2023 - In Kamchatka, another foreign citizen fined for "illegal" missionary work

Sova Center - On January 20, 2023, the Elizovsky District Court of the Kamchatka Territory found the foreign citizen **Abdulmashit Abduvaliev** guilty under Part 5 of Art. 5.26 of the Code of Administrative Offenses (implementation by a foreign citizen of missionary activity in violation of the requirements of the law) and fined him 30 thousand rubles.

According to the court, he, being in the temporary detention center for foreign citizens of the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs for the Kamchatka Territory, "conducted religious ceremonies with the participation of at least 10-12 persons", without permits and not belonging to any religious organization. Abduvaliev admitted guilt.

20.01.2023 - Court of Appeal in Krasnoyarsk upheld the verdict against 56-year-old Yevgeniy Zinich.

Link to full text in Russian: <https://www.jw-russia.org/news/2023/01/200900.html>

On January 19, 2022, the Judicial Chamber for Criminal Cases of the Krasnoyarsk Regional Court upheld the verdict against **Yevgeniy Zinich**—6 years in a penal colony for reading the Bible. The believer still insists on his innocence and can appeal the verdict through the cassation process.

In addition to the term in the penal colony, Zinich is deprived of the right to engage in the organizational activity in public associations and religious organizations for 2 years and his freedom is limited for a year. After the verdict was announced, Yevgeniy spent six months in a pre-trial detention center, awaiting an appeal.

[Continue reading...](#)

19.01.2023 - A second appeal in Rostov-on-Don toughened the sentence for Arsen Avanesov.

Link to full text in Russian : <https://www.jw-russia.org/news/2023/01/190846.html>

Recently it became known that back on August 8, 2022, the Rostov Regional Court toughened the punishment for one of the three believers from Rostov , Arsen Avanesov, who was previously sentenced to 6.5 years in a penal colony, adding another six months to the term.

In June 2022, the court of cassation in Krasnodar upheld the verdict against **Vilen Avanesov and Aleksandr Parkov**, but satisfied the prosecutor's request regarding Arsen. The believer was again charged with "financing extremist activity", a charge that the court had previously excluded. Later the case of Arsen Avanesov returned to the stage of appeal, where his sentence was toughened.

[Continue reading...](#)

19.01.2023 - The Yaroslavl City Hall is trying to sue the building of the pilgrimage center from the diocese

Sova Center - On January 17, 2023, it became known that the mayor's office of Yaroslavl filed a lawsuit against the Yaroslavl diocese with an arbitration court. The city authorities demand that the diocese's right of ownership to the building of the pilgrimage center on Bogoyavlenskaya Square be recognized as missing.

The building was transferred to the use of the diocese in 1994 for the purpose of reconstruction. At the same time, the diocese registered it as a property, which, according to the city authorities, was done in violation of the law.

[Continue reading...](#)

17.01.2023 - The appeal Court upheld the verdict against six believers from Saransk.

Link to full text in Russian: <https://www.jw-russia.org/news/2023/01/171601.html>

On January 16, 2023, the Supreme Court of the Republic of Mordovia upheld the sentence of six Jehovah's Witnesses from Saransk: 6 years imprisonment for **Atryakhin**, 4 years and 2 months in a penal colony for **the Nikulins**, and 2 years imprisonment for **Shevchuk, Korolev, and Antonov**.

[Continue reading...](#)

17.01.2023 - The Cassation Court did not change the sentence of five of Jehovah's Witnesses from Kursk.

Link to full text in Russian: <https://www.jw-russia.org/news/2023/01/171448.html>

On January 12, 2023, the First Cassation Court of General Jurisdiction in Saratov left unchanged the verdict of the Promyshlenny District Court of the city of Kursk and the appellate ruling of the Judicial Panel for Criminal Cases of the Kursk Regional Court against five of Jehovah's Witnesses.

[Continue reading...](#)

16.01.2023 - The court began consideration of the case of ex-shiigumen Sergiy (Romanov) and Vsevolod Moguchev

Sova center - On August 16, 2022, the Babushkinsky District Court of Moscow began considering the merits of the case of the former shiigumen **Sergiy (Romanov)** and his assistant **Vsevolod Moguchev**, accused under paragraph "c" of Part 2 of Art. 282 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation (actions aimed at inciting hatred or enmity, committed publicly, including using the Internet, by an organized group).

They are charged with publishing videos aimed at inciting hatred towards Jews, Catholics and Muslims.

Both defendants plead not guilty.

[Continue reading...](#)

Special bimonthly: religious persecution and issues – Jan 01-15

13.01.2023 - The Court of Appeal canceled the recovery of 931 million rubles from the Catholic Archdiocese

Sova Center - On January 11, 2023, the Ninth Arbitration Court of Appeal overturned the decision of the Moscow Arbitration Court to recover 931 million rubles from the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of the Mother of God in Moscow in favor of the Affordable Housing company.

The decision of the Court of Appeal came into force from the date of its adoption. Recall that the company represented the interests of a religious organization in the process of returning buildings in Milyutinsky Lane and demanded remuneration for its

services in accordance with the contract, but the archdiocese refused to pay it. In October 2022, the Moscow Arbitration Court ordered the archdiocese to pay the required amount, but the appeal instance overturned this decision and ordered Affordable Housing LLC to pay the Catholics legal costs in the amount of three thousand rubles.

12.01.2023 - The Supreme Court of Russia partially satisfied the appeal of four Jehovah's Witnesses from Omsk. One of them has already served a full prison term for his faith.

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2023/01/120938.html>

On January 11, 2023, the Supreme Court of Russia considered the cassation complaint of Jehovah's Witnesses against the guilty verdict in the extremism case handed down on November 30, 2020 in Omsk and satisfied it in terms of revising the sentence served by **Sergey Polyakov**.

The Pervomaisky District Court of the city of Omsk more than 2 years ago sentenced Polyakov to 3 years in a penal colony, and 3 women were given a suspended sentence: **Anastasia Polyakova** 2.5 years, **Gaukhar Bektemirova**—2 years and 3 months, **Dinara Dyusekeyeva**—2 years. In May 2021, the appeal approved the verdict, and a year later this decision was upheld by the Eighth Court of Cassation of General Jurisdiction in Kemerovo. In November 2022, Sergey Polyakov was released after serving his full term in a colony.

[Continue reading...](#)

12.01.2023 - The Court in Kyzyl sentenced Anatoliy Senin to six years suspended sentence for his faith.

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2023/01/120935.html>

Six years suspended sentence—with such a sentence on January 12, 2023, the consideration of the case of Anatoliy Senin in the Kyzyl city court ended. Judge Vyacheslav Kyzyl-ool considered the discussion of the Bible among fellow believers to be an organization of extremist activity.

The starting point for the criminal prosecution of the believer was the searches in Kyzyl in January 2021. Then **Anatoliy Senin** was detained, and then sent under house arrest for 56 days. The believer was accused of organizing the activities of an extremist organization. Investigator of the RF IC Olchi Ohemchik considered the broadcasting of video recordings of religious content, the inducement to pray, sing religious songs and study the Bible as extremist actions.

[Continue reading...](#)

12.01.2023 - Cassation sent the case of 71-year-old Lyudmila Salikova, for a new appeal

Link to full text in Russian - <https://jw-russia.org/news/2023/01/120936.html>

On January 11, 2022, the Seventh Court of Cassation of General Jurisdiction in Chelyabinsk overturned the appeal ruling against **Lyudmila Salikova**. An appeal

against a verdict for the faith of a veteran of the nuclear industry and a veteran of labor will be considered by a different composition of the Court of Appeal.

"If the courts had correctly applied the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation, they would have acquitted me," Lyudmila told the cassation court. "Communicating, reading and studying the Bible with my fellow believers, singing songs, praying, as well as telling others about my Bible-based beliefs, the investigation charged me with a crime."

[Continue reading...](#)

12.01.2023 - The deep Constitution of Russia and the Russian Orthodox Church

Byu Law - Mikhail Antonov is a professor of law associated with the Law Faculty of the National Research University Higher School of Economics in Saint Petersburg.

At the formal level, the Russian Constitution provides a standard set of antidiscrimination guarantees that are similar to many constitutions of Western countries. It proclaims Russia to be a democratic Rechtsstaat (Article 1) and enumerates a solid list of inalienable rights and freedoms in Chapter 2. In particular, Article 13 guarantees ideological diversity and prohibits any state ideology; Article 14 establishes that Russia is a secular state in which there shall be no state or obligatory religion and that religious associations are separated from the State and equal before the law.

[Continue reading...](#)

12.01.2023 - Crimean imam sentenced to 17 years in prison

Sova center - On January 12, 2023, the Southern District Military Court in Rostov-on-Don found Crimean Imam Raif Fevziev guilty in the case of involvement in the radical Islamic party Hizb ut-Tahrir, which is recognized as a terrorist organization in Russia. He was sentenced to 17 years in prison, the first three years the imam will spend in prison, the rest of the term in a strict regime colony. As an additional punishment, restriction of freedom for one and a half years was appointed.

[Continue reading...](#)

11.01.2023 - Religious repression in Putin's Russia

Providence - While religion was formally abolished under the USSR, under Putin it has been repressed. Consequently, the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom identified Russia as one of the world's worst violators of religious freedom.

In December 2021, just two months before the invasion of Ukraine, Russia's supreme Court dissolved the non-governmental agency (NGO) Memorial, which is the oldest and most respected human rights organization in Russia and an outspoken supporter of religious freedom. Among other activities, the group was compiling a list of those imprisoned for alleged offenses related to religion. The dissolution of Memorial was seen as a warning to other activists, that they too could be prosecuted for speaking out against Putin's government.

[Continue reading...](#)

11.01.2023 - The Moscow Arbitration Court ordered the Catholic Archdiocese to pay a debt to a firm that helped return buildings

Sova center - On October 5, 2022, it became known that the Moscow Arbitration Court ordered the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of the Mother of God in Moscow to pay about 930 million rubles to the Affordable Housing company. In accordance with the agreement concluded in 2016, the company assumed the financial costs in a lawsuit to return the buildings in Milyutinsky Lane to the Catholics.

[Continue reading...](#)

11.01.2023 - The Kemerovo Court of Cassation upheld the conviction of Aleksandr Bondarchuk and Sergey Yavushkin—Four years suspended

[Link to full text in Russian - https://jw-russia.org/news/2023/01/111049.html](https://jw-russia.org/news/2023/01/111049.html)

On January 10, 2023, the Eighth Cassation Court of General Jurisdiction in Kemerovo upheld the conviction of Aleksandr Bondarchuk and Sergey Yavushkin - 4 years of suspended sentence. The hearing was held in person and was attended by 12 of the defendants' relatives and friends.

The court of first instance passed its sentence in June 2021, and in February 2022, the appeal left it unchanged. **Aleksandr Bondarchuk** and **Sergey Yavushkin** still do not agree with the charges against them, as they reported in their appeals: "Neither the verdict nor the appellate ruling provides clear criteria by which we can clearly see what specific actions we took were a continuation of illegal activities of a liquidated legal entity."

[Continue reading...](#)

10.01.2023 - Prosecutor General's Office: Banned translation of "Sahih al-Bukhari" contains distortions "in favor of Salafi ideas"

Sova Center - On January 9, 2023, the Coordinating Center for Muslims of the North Caucasus (KCMSC) published the response of the Prosecutor General's Office to a request regarding the recognition of the collection of hadiths "Sahih al-Bukhari" as extremist material.

Recall that one of the editions of this authoritative collection in a summary of the 15th-century imam al-Zubaidi (M.: Umma, 2007) was banned by a court in Tatarstan in December 2021. The decision stood in the court of appeal, after which the publication was included in the Federal List of Extremist Materials. The ban provoked a critical reaction from many Muslim figures.

[Continue reading...](#)

03.01.2023 - Moscow's former chief rabbi: 'The best option for Russian Jews is to leave'

JTA - Pinchas Goldshmidt, the former chief rabbi of Moscow who fled the country earlier this year, said other Russian Jews should leave before it's too late in an interview with the Guardian.

"When we look back over Russian history, whenever the political system was in danger you saw the government trying to redirect the anger and discontent of the masses towards the Jewish community," Goldschmidt told the Guardian. "We saw this in tsarist times and at the end of the Stalinist regime."

He argued that Russia's floundering invasion of Ukraine is starting to foster a similar environment.

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RUSSIA/ FAKE NEWS CORNER: "Ukraine is a Catholic conspiracy, the Pope is a monster and a thief," a Russian Orthodox leader says

Protodeacon Vladimir Vasilik defies ridicule by connecting the war to a plot by Pope Francis to incorporate Ukrainian Orthodox into the Catholic Church.

by Massimo Introvigne

[Bitter Winter](#) (11.01.2023) - Protodeacon Vladimir Vasilik is not, as you may believe by reading its prose, a lonely madman. Not only is he a scholar who has published about Church history in [respected Western journals](#), but he is a member of the Russian Orthodox Church's powerful Synodal Liturgical Commission and a frequent contributor to church journals and magazines.

Vasilik took exception to Pope Francis's [Christmas message](#), where he invited those gathered in St. Peter's Square in Rome to look at the "faces of our Ukrainian brothers and sisters who are living this Christmas in the dark, in the cold or away from their homes because of the devastation caused by ten months of war."

While Pope Francis is usually more than moderate in his comments about the Ukrainian war, Vasilik expressed his anger that the Pope did not mention "the Russian brothers and sisters" who also die in the war. Thus, he [took the opportunity](#) to "unmask" the Pope and claim that the events in Ukraine ultimately are the results of a sinister plot by the Vatican.

Not only is the Catholic Church conspiring against Russia and Orthodoxy since the 16th century, Vasilik said, it has now become clear that the Vatican organized "the Maidan of 2014. For even the blind can see that the most ardent activists on the Maidan were Uniate Catholic priests [i.e., priests of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church]." Some of Vasilik's colleagues—the Protodeacon is also [an anti-cult activist](#)—believe the 2014 Maidan had really been [organized by Scientology](#), but it is true that they did write that Catholics also cooperated.

Pope Francis is singled out as the mastermind of particularly sinister plots. He became Pope in 2013, and in 2014 the Maidan Revolution happened, an event that in Russian propaganda made the invasions of 2014 and 2022 unavoidable.

Francis, according to Vasilik, is “the main beneficiary” of what is happening in Ukraine. Why? Because the war situation is giving the Ukrainian government the pretext to suppress the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate and merge it with the branch of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church that is in communion with the Patriarch of Constantinople.

However, Vasilik says, “there are long-term plans for the unification of the Patriarchate of Constantinople and the Roman Catholic Church. The year is already known—2025—the year of the anniversary of the First Ecumenical Council, which Catholic heretics and Greek traitors to Orthodoxy are going to celebrate in such a perverted way. And they decided to choose Ukraine as a testing ground for such an alliance. The idea is simple—the creation of a single national church of Ukraine. First, schismatic groups are driven into the so-called OCU [the Orthodox Church of Ukraine in communion with Constantinople], and then the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate is attached to it, not willingly, but by hook or by crook. And then all this is connected with the Uniates. Thus, a single Ukrainian church of the Eastern rite is being created.”

Pope Francis, Vasilik says, is a monster, “a crocodile who, when he eats his prey, sheds tears incessantly, but eats, nonetheless. In the same way, the Pope of Rome can weep, lament, mourn. However, this will not stop him from eating the Orthodox—his work is such, more precisely, his nature is such. He is not the Pope, not a father, but he is a thief, a real thief. And ‘the thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy’ (John 10:10).”

Protodeacon Vasilik has some [hope for the new year](#), though. He hopes 2023 will bring peace. But peace, he explains, is “something we can acquire only through war.” Not the “commercial war” some Russian commanders fought in Ukraine—which explains, or so Vasilik believes, why they preferred to abandon Ukrainian cities rather than destroying their valuable infrastructures—but a full-fledged holy war. Either we win, Vasilik proclaims, or “we will disappear, as a country and a people. Or even disappear physically. In this case, we have only one choice: win or die. You cannot fight and trade at the same time. However, for some reason, these elementary truth did not sound convincing to some of our commanders. I wish then to sound the alarm for them, and tell them that in 2023 Russia will be renewed, cleansed of its sins—abortion, corruption, embezzlement, and the presence of atheists and cultists—, and finally of obscenity. Then, finally, Russia will become Holy Russia.”

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.

РОССИЯ/УГОЛОК ФЕЙКОВЫХ НОВОСТЕЙ: «Украина это католический заговор, Папа Римский изверг и вор», заявил лидер Русской православной церкви

Протоиерей Владимир Василик бросает вызов насмешкам, связывая войну с заговором Папы Франциска с целью присоединения православных украинцев к католической церкви.

Массимо Интровинье

[Bitter Winter](#) (11.01.2023) - Протоиерей Владимир Василик вовсе не одинокий сумасшедший, как можно подумать, читая его сочинения. Он не только ученый, публиковавшийся по истории Церкви в [авторитетных Западных журналах](#), но и член влиятельной Синодальной литургической комиссии Русской Православной Церкви и частый автор церковных журналов.

Василик возразил против [Рождественского послания](#) Папы Франциска, в котором последний призвал собравшихся на площади Святого Петра в Риме посмотреть на «лица наших украинских братьев и сестер, которые проживают это Рождество в темноте, на холоде или вдали от своих домов из-за разрушений, вызванных десятью месяцами войны».

В то время как Папа Франциск обычно более чем сдержан в своих комментариях об украинской войне, Василик выразил гнев по поводу того, что Папа не упомянул «российских братьев и сестер», которые также погибают на войне. Таким образом, он [воспользовался возможностью](#), чтобы «разоблачить» Папу и заявить, что события на Украине в конечном итоге являются результатом зловещего заговора Ватикана.

По словам Василика, мало того, что католическая церковь замышляет против России и православия с XVI века, теперь стало ясно, что Ватикан организовал «Майдан 2014 года». Ибо даже слепой видит, что самые ярые активисты на Майдане были униатские католические священники [т.е. священниками Украинской Греко-Католической Церкви]». Некоторые коллеги Василика — протоиереи [тоже антикультуристские активисты](#) — считают, что Майдан 2014 года в действительности был [организован саентологами](#), однако, в сотрудничестве с католиками.

Франциск, по словам Василика, является «главным бенефициаром» происходящего в Украине. Почему? Потому что военная ситуация дает украинскому правительству предлог для подавления Украинской Православной Церкви Московского Патриархата и слияния ее с отделением Украинской Православной Церкви, состоящим в общении с Константинопольским Патриархом.

Однако, говорит Василик, «есть долгосрочные планы по объединению Константинопольской патриархии и Римско-католической церкви. Уже известен и год — 2025 год — год юбилея I Вселенского Собора, который католические еретики и греческие предатели Православия собираются отметить таким извращенным образом. А в качестве полигона подобного соединения решили избрать Украину.

Идея проста — создание единой национальной церкви Украины. Вначале сгоняют раскольнические группировки в так называемую ПЦУ [Православная церковь Украины в сопричастности с Константинополем], а затем к ней не добровольно, а всеми правдами и неправдами присоединяют Украинскую православную церковь Московского патриархата. А затем все это соединяется с униатами. Таким образом, создается единая украинская церковь восточного обряда».

Папа Франциск, говорит Василик, — это чудовище, «крокодил, который, съедая свою жертву, слезит неспрестанно, однако, ест. Точно так же Папа Римский может рыдать, сетовать, скорбеть. Однако, поедать православных от этого он не перестанет — работа у него такая, точнее — природа у него такая. Он не папа, не отец, не батюшка, а татюшка, вор, тать. А «тать не приходит, разве да украдет, и убьет, и погубит» (Ин. 10:10)».

У протодиакона Василика есть твердая [надежда на новый год](#). Он надеется, что 2023 год принесет мир. Но мир, объясняет он, «это то, что мы можем обрести только с помощью войны». Не «коммерческая война», которую вели русские командиры в Украине, объясняет, по мнению Василика, почему они предпочитали покидать украинские города, а не разрушать их ценную инфраструктуру, — потому что это полноценная священная война.

Либо мы победим, провозглашает Василик, либо «исчезнем как страна и народ. Или даже исчезнем физически. В данном случае у нас есть только один выбор: победить или умереть. Нельзя одновременно воевать и торговать. Однако почему-то эти азбучные истины для некоторых официальных лиц не звучат убедительно. Желая, чтобы они для них зазвучали набатом, тогда в 2023 году Россия обновится, очистится от своих грехов — аборт, коррупции, казнокрадства, безбожия и сектантства, от мата, наконец. Тогда, наконец, Россия станет Святой Русью».

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 главным автором [Enciclopedia delle religioni in Italia](#) (Энциклопедия религий в Италии). Он является членом редакционной коллегии [Междисциплинарного журнала исследований религии](#) и исполнительного совета издательства *Nova Religio* Калифорнийского университета. С 5 января по 31 декабря 2011 года он занимал должность «Представителя по борьбе с расизмом, ксенофобией и дискриминацией, уделяя особое внимание дискриминации в отношении 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 наблюдения за проблемами [религиозной свободы](#) в мировом масштабе.

Протодиакон Владимир Василик. [кредит фото](#)

47 Jehovah's Witnesses sentenced to prison terms in 2022

Since 2017, Russian authorities have placed over 500 Witnesses on the federal list of extremists and terrorists (!)

By Willy Fautré, director of Human Rights Without Frontiers

HRWF (10.01.2023) – As of 31 December, 47 Jehovah's Witnesses were sentenced to a prison term. The last one, Alexander Filatov, got a six-year sentence on 28 December a few hours after the headquarters of Jehovah's Witnesses in the United States had published a press release announcing a slightly lower figure.

Since 2017, Russian authorities have placed over 500 Witnesses on the federal list of extremists and terrorists. Russia is misemploying its anti-extremist legislation to ban, imprison, and at times, beat and torture Jehovah's Witnesses. Jehovah's Witnesses are peaceful, law-abiding citizens—anything but extremists—and thus have repeatedly condemned Russia for its unmistakable discrimination-based ban. Jehovah's Witnesses around the world are eager to see their fellow believers in Russia released from prison.

December (12)

Alexander Nikolayevich FILATOV, 38 years (6 years)

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)

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)

Aleksandr Viktorovich LITVINYUK, 62 years (6 years)

Aleksandr Fedorovich DUBOVENKO, 49 years (6 years)

November (3)

Viktor Vladimirovich ZIMOVSKIY, 53 years (6 years and 2 months)

Aleksandr Ivanovich SEREDKIN, 67 years (6 years)

Andrey Emikovich DANIELYAN, 53 years (6 years)

October (7)

Vladimir BUKIN, 50 years (6 years and 6 months)
Sergey Vitaliyevich YUFEROV, 47 years (6 years and 6 months)
Valeriy SLASHCHEV, 41 years (6 years and 6 months)
Mikhail Ivanovich BURKOV, 39 years (6 years and 2 months)
Vladimir Ivanovich MALADYKA, 59 years (6 years)
Vladimir Fedorovich SAKADA, 52 years (6 years)
Yevgeniy Sergeyevich ZHUKOV, 53 years (6 years)

September (6)

Aleksey Valeriyevich DYADKIN, 33 years (7 years)
Nikita Valeriyevich MOISEYEV, 32 years (7 years)
Vladimir Nikolayevich POPOV, 55 years (7 years)
Yevgeniy Viktorovich RAZUMOV, 43 years (7 years)
Oleg Grigoriyevich SHIDLOVSKIY, 53 years (6 1/2 years)
Aleksey Vladimirovich GORELIY, 42 years (6 1/2 years)

August (6)

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)

June (4)

Vladimir ERMOLAEV, 34 years (6 ½ years)
Alexander PUTINTSEV, 48 years (6 ½ years)
Igor MAMALIMOV, 46 years (6 years)
Evgeniy Nikolaevich ZINICH, 56 years (6 years)

May (2)

Andrey VLASOV, 53 years old (7 years)
Lyudmila Ivanovna SHCHEKOLDINA, 46 years (4 years and 1 month)

March (2)

Tatyana Yuriyevna VELIZHANINA, 50 years (1 year and 5 months) Released
Vladimir Viktorovich DESHKO, 55 years (1 year and 4 months) Released

February (1)

Anatoliy GORBUNOV, 64 years old (6 years)

January (4)

Yevgeny KOROTUN, 52 years old (7 years + 2 years of restricted freedom)
Anna SAFRONOVA, 57 years old (6 years)
Andrei KOLESNICHENKO, 52 years old (4 years + 1 year of restricted freedom)
Maksim BELTIKOV, 42 years old (2 years)

Photo courtesy: Jehovah's Witnesses

New records in 2022 in the campaign of persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses

[The European Times](#) (29.12.2022) - This year, Russian courts sentenced over 40% more Jehovah's Witnesses (45) to prison than last year (32). This resulted in a peak of 115 men and women in prison at one time—the most since the 2017 Supreme Court ruling that effectively banned the Witnesses' activities.

"Russia is now marking a new milestone of disgrace," **states Rachel Denber, deputy director of Human Rights Watch's Europe and Central Asia Division.** "No one should spend a second being prosecuted, let alone in prison, for the peaceful expression of their religious beliefs. It is never too late to stop these repressive and unlawful practices, to free all people imprisoned for their peaceful religious activity, and to quash the notorious Supreme Court ruling banning the Jehovah's Witnesses." (*for comments by 11 additional experts from Europe, Russia, and the U.S., see subhead below: What do experts think?*)

Persecution has intensified, despite a landmark ruling in June 2022 by the European Court of Human Rights declaring the 2017 ban on Jehovah's Witnesses as baseless violation of international human rights covenants that should be reversed. The Court directed Russia to halt all pending criminal proceedings against Jehovah's Witnesses and release those imprisoned. [See p. 85, §11 of judgment ([link](#)).] Just weeks ago, the Council of Europe's Secretary General urged Russia to comply with the ECHR's judgement, as it is obligated to do, and reverse the ban on Jehovah's Witnesses. [See p. 2 of letter ([link](#)).]

Jarrold Lopes, a spokesperson for Jehovah's Witnesses, stated:

"Since 2017, Russian authorities have placed over 500 Witnesses on the federal list of extremists and terrorists.* Russia is misemploying its anti-extremist legislation to ban, imprison, and at times beat and torture Jehovah's Witnesses. It's hard to believe this poorly veiled crackdown has continued for over five years. Numerous international experts, officials, and courts at the highest level have acknowledged that Jehovah's Witnesses are peaceful, law-abiding citizens—anything but extremists—and thus have repeatedly condemned Russia for its unmistakable discrimination-based ban. Jehovah's Witnesses around the world are eager to see their fellow believers in Russia released from prison so

they can be free to raise their children, free to support their communities, and free to worship as they are in over 230 other lands across the globe.”

* Being on the list—which is publicly accessible—stigmatizes them and has prevented many from getting jobs. Other burdensome consequences include having their bank accounts blocked and having difficulty obtaining or renewing insurance policies, selling property, managing investments, receiving inheritances, or even purchasing mobile phone SIM cards.

Russia’s persecution of JW’s in 2022 by the numbers (as of December 23, 2022)

- **121** convicted for so-called extremist activity and sentenced to various penalties. This figure has steadily increased—**18** in 2019; **39** in 2020; and **111** in 2021
- **45** sentenced to prison to a total of **250** years in prison. This is more than a **40% increase** to the 32 sentenced to prison in 2021
 - **35** out of the 45 were sent to prison for six years
- In September 2022, the number of Witnesses in prison at one time **exceeded 100 for the first time** since the 2017 Supreme Court ruling. As of Dec. 23, 2022, there was a **peak of 115 behind bars**
 - **19** in prison are **over the age of 60**
 - **Oldest** is **Boris Andreev, 71**, from Primorye Territory. He was 70 when ordered to pretrial detention in October 2022 ([link](#))
 - The most inhumane sentence in 2022 is **7 years for Andrey Vlasov**, who is disabled and struggles to manage daily activities without assistance ([link](#) to video)
 - A total of **367** believers have spent some time behind bars since May 2017
- **200** searches of JW homes conducted this year in **39** localities of Russia
 - Over **1,800** homes have been searched since 2017 ban, leading to criminal investigations or charges filed against more than **670** Witnesses
- Criminal cases against Jehovah’s Witnesses have been filed in **72** regions of Russia by the end of 2022—this is two more than in 2021

Photo: The former Russian branch property of Jehovah’s Witnesses that was confiscated by the Russian government after the ban in 2017. It included 14 buildings on more than 100,000 square meters (1,076,391 sq ft) of land on the outskirts of St. Petersburg. Courtesy: Jehovah’s Witnesses