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## **Repeated ill-treatment of Jehovah's Witness Anna Safronova in a Penal Colony in Russia**

[The European Times](#) (16.04.2025) - Anna Safronova, 59, a Jehovah's Witness, convicted for her faith, is subjected to inhuman treatment in penal colony No. 7 in Zelenokumsk (Stavropol Territory), and she also does not receive proper medical care. The reason for this punishment was that her religious beliefs prevented her from wearing the St. George ribbon (a patriotic symbol).

Safronova has been in the colony for 2 years and 9 months. During 2024, her blood pressure began to rise noticeably and one day she even lost consciousness. She also has pathologically swollen and painful legs.

### ***Punished for refusing to wear a military symbol***

Particular pressure on the believer began after she refused to wear the St. George ribbon.

After that, Safronova was placed in a punishment cell on a fabricated violation – food was planted in her personal belongings.

The St George ribbon is a component of many high military decorations awarded by the Russian Empire, the Soviet Union and the current Russian Federation.

In the early 21st century, the ribbon of Saint George has come to be used for commemorating the veterans of the Eastern Front of WW II. It is the primary symbol used in association with Victory. It enjoys wide popularity in Russia as a patriotic symbol, as well as a way to show public support to the Russian government.

Yaroslav Sivulsky, a representative of the European Association of Jehovah's Witnesses, explained: "Believers respect the state. They do not encroach on the right of other people to have political convictions, to honor state, patriotic or any other symbols as they see fit. At the same time, the Witnesses are convinced that Jehovah God is the supreme ruler, and his laws are superior to those of the secular authorities. They adhere to this Christian position regardless of the country of residence and the current political system. That is why they do not riot, do not participate in wars and patriotic ceremonies. Ignorance or misunderstanding of this historically proven truth leads to unmotivated cruelty, which is what happens to Anna Safronova."

### ***Repeated punishments and ill-treatment on trumped-up charges***

Such sanctions in a detention center cannot exceed 15 days for one violation, but the prisoner can be kept there longer, appointing new penalties under the pretext of other violations. This was the case of Safronova.

From April 29 to May 14, 2024, Anna Safronova was kept in a punishment cell, where she was placed with a severe cough. Safronova was not given any medication – this provoked an increase in bronchitis. Soon she was again sent to the punishment cell for refusing to wear the St. George ribbon. According to the lawyer, in December 2024, Anna was forbidden to take free seats on the lower tier of beds: "Due to the pain, Anna was forced to climb onto the upper tier every time."

On March 22, 2025, after the morning formation, Anna was taken to a stuffy, windowless room and forced to stand continuously for 10 hours. "Before that, all the furniture was taken out of the room so that Anna could not sit down. And it is forbidden to sit on the floor by the internal regulations, for violation of which a penalty is imposed. After receiving a penalty, the prisoner loses the right to early release, and the conditions of detention are also toughened for him," the lawyer said.

### ***Critical health conditions***

By the evening, her legs got very swollen and bruised on them. The next day, Anna was again taken indoors, and this time she stood for 13 hours without being able to sit down. During all this time, she was allowed to go to the toilet only once. The next day, the lawyer had to call an ambulance for her, which turned out to be the only way to "get Anna out of the premises with unbearable conditions."

On March 26, 2025, her defender sent a complaint to the Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Russia for the Sovetsky City District of Zelenokumsk with a request to appoint a forensic medical examination, initiate a criminal case and bring officials to justice. But on March 27, Anna was again sent to the punishment cell on trumped-up charges – for 20 days.

Anna Safronova became the first female Jehovah's Witness, in Russia to be sentenced to a record long prison term of 6 years in prison for her faith in God. Presumably, she should be released from the colony in August 2027.

The situation with Anna Safronova is not the first case of mistreatment of Russian Jehovah's Witnesses in prison. On March 20, 2025, 67-year-old [Valeriy Baylo died](#) in pre-trial detention center No. 3 in Novorossiysk — his requests for medical care and hospitalization remained unanswered.

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## Religious issues and persecution: Bimonthly Digest April 01-15

### 15.04.2025 - Criminal trial of anti-war believer begins, another continues, third awaited

Forum 18 - On 14 April, a military court began the trial of Christian preacher Eduard Charov on criminal charges of repeat "discreditation" of the Armed Forces and "public justification of terrorism". He is accused over social media posts criticising Russia's war against Ukraine. The trial of Zen Buddhist leader Ilya Vasilyev – arrested in June 2024 - continues in Moscow over anti-war posts he made "solely out of religious conviction". Protestant pastor Nikolay Romanyuk is under investigation for an anti-war sermon. A court extended pre-trial detention until June, despite his poor health.

On 14 April, the criminal trial of 53-year-old independent Christian preacher Eduard Charov for repeat "discreditation" of the Armed Forces began at the Central Region Military Court in Yekaterinburg. Charov also stands accused of "public calls to commit terrorist activities, public justification of terrorism or propaganda of terrorism, using the internet" for what his wife Inna called a "sarcastic comment" on social media on another user's post. Charov's next hearing is due on 27 May.

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### 15.04.2025 - The court in Birobidzhan sentenced Jehovah's Witness to suspended imprisonment

Sova - On April 10, 2025, the Birobidzhansky District Court sentenced Jehovah's Witness **Vladlena Kukavitsa**. The court found her guilty on the ch. 1.1 and 2 Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code (involvement in the activities of an extremist organization and participation in it) and sentenced to six years of suspended imprisonment with a five-year probation period. As an additional punishment, she was sentenced to two years of restriction of liberty.

The State Prosecutor in the debate of the parties, which began on February 27, 2025, asked to sentence Kukavits to seven years of suspended imprisonment.

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### 14.04.2025 - Prosecuting blasphemy in Russia

USCIRF - Russia has intensified its enforcement of laws targeting perceived offensive expression toward religion, religious texts, and religious leaders. The Criminal Code penalizes "insulting the religious feelings of believers," a vague, undefined standard that constitutes a blasphemy law. Following its 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the government hardened its policing of speech. While certain offensive statements and actions may warrant public rebuke, prosecuting perceived offensive expressions

regarding religion violates the right to freedom of religion or belief. This report provides an overview of blasphemy law enforcement in Russia and highlights recent cases.

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### **14.04.2025 - In the Nizhny Novgorod region, a rural community is trying to legalize the mosque building**

Sova - On April 13, 2025, it became known that the Local Religious Organization of Muslims of the village of Staromochalei, Pilnensky district, Nizhny Novgorod region, appealed to the Arbitration Court of the region with a claim to the district administration to legalize the mosque building.

The building with an area of 141 square meters on Svobody Street is considered an illegal construction.

The district administration does not object to the plaintiff's claims. The consideration of the claim is scheduled for May 7.

### **11.04.2025 - The Ministry of Justice is trying to liquidate the Muslim community in Mozhaisk**

Sova - On April 9, 2025, consideration of the claim of the Ministry of Justice for the liquidation of the Muslim community "Vatany" in Mozhaisk began. The Ministry of Justice considered the reason for the liquidation to mention in the minutes of the constituent meeting a person who died three days before the meeting.

"An error in the protocol in the presence of a quorum is not a reason for liquidation. The Muslim community did not violate the law, its activities are legal and do not pose a threat," said Larisa Aliyeva, a lawyer of the community.

### **10.04.2025 - Religious liberty, Putin, and Lukashenko**

Providence - While peace talks in Saudi Arabia grapple with Russia's war in Ukraine, Moscow and its junior partner Belarus are already planning their next military collaboration as Russian convoys are reportedly congregating in Minsk to prepare for Zapad-2025 exercises. Amid this shadow of negotiations and saber-rattling, let's not forget Alexander Lukashenko's iron-fisted Belarusian regime, a persistent threat to Central and Eastern Europe.

Among the victims of Lukashenko's tyranny are members of Belarus's Polish and Catholic minority, whose cultural identity has made them targets in an intensifying campaign of repression—a campaign that aligns with Russia's hybrid warfare against NATO.

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### **10.04.2025 - The court in Moscow sent two Jehovah's Witnesses to the pre-trial detention center**

Sova - **Viktor Velikov** and **Andrei Lukin** are accused of financing extremist activities. On April 10, 2025, the Savelovsky District Court of Moscow sent Viktor Velikov, a 54-year-old Jehovah's Witness from Solnechnogorsk near Moscow, to the pre-trial detention center. He is accused under Part 1 of Art. 282.3 of the Criminal Code (financing the activities of an extremist organization). The corresponding criminal case was initiated on August 5, 2024. Velykov was detained on April 8 after a search.

On April 10, Jehovah's Witness Andrei Lukin and his wife were searched in Tver as part of the same criminal case. Lukin was taken to Moscow and also sent to the pre-trial detention center.

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### **09.04.2025 - How the Orthodox Church influences Russian families and Putin's regime**

Religion Unplugged - Six months after the invasion of Ukraine, the Putin regime announced a document titled "State Policy for the Preservation and Strengthening of Traditional Russian Spiritual and Moral Values." The document aimed to shape the worldview of Russians by outlining various values, including a "strong family."

Indeed, Putin has utilized the rhetoric surrounding the traditional values, which the Russian Orthodox Church has promoted, for his own purpose in wartime. "Traditional values," especially family values, are significantly central in the ROC teachings.

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### **09.04.2025 - The sentence of Jehovah's Witnesses from Kamchatka has been approved**

Sova - The Kamchatka Regional Court left unchanged the sentence, according to which Sergei and Elena Chechulin were sentenced to six years of probation.

On April 8, 2025, the Kamchatka Regional Court left unchanged the sentence, which on February 19, 2025 Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky city passed in the case of Jehovah's Witnesses Elena and Sergei Chechulin.

The defendants were found guilty of organizing the activities of an extremist organization (part 1 of Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code) and sentenced them to six years of suspended imprisonment with a three-year probationary period. In addition, as additional punishments, they received a year of restriction of liberty and three years of ban on leading and participating in religious associations.

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### **07.04.2025 - The Jehovah's Witness case was referred to court in Novocheboksarsk**

Sova - On March 27, 2025, the case of Jehovah's Witness Alexander Protasov was submitted to the Novocheboksary City Court of Chuvashia. He is accused under Part 1 of Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code in the organization of the activities of a banned local religious organization.

The case against Protasov, who had previously received the status of a witness in the case of Yuri Yuskov, was initiated on September 3, 2024. On September 26, Protasov was accepted a non-departure subscription as a defendant. The believer is accused of holding religious meetings of Jehovah's Witnesses.

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### **03.04.2025 - The leader of the "Karakol Initiative Group" was convicted**

Sova - On April 2, 2025, Vasily Chekurashev, a 73-year-old resident of the Ongudai district of the Altai Republic, was convicted.

The court found him guilty under Part 1 of Art. 282.2 (organization of the activities of an extremist organization) and Part 1 of Art. 282.3 of the Criminal Code (financing of extremist activities) and sentenced to six years and eight months of suspended imprisonment with a probationary period of four years and six months, with deprivation of the right to organize public and religious associations for a period of five years, with restriction of liberty for one year.

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### **03.04.2025 - Russian Jehovah's Witness jailed for managing extremist 'cells'**

Reuters - A Jehovah's Witness in the Russian city of Chelyabinsk was sentenced to six years in prison on Thursday for organising the activities of an extremist group, the local interior ministry said.

Maxim Khamatshin, 28, is one of 850 Jehovah's Witnesses to be prosecuted in Russia in the eight years since it was banned. During that time, according to the faith group, 588 members were added to a federal register of extremists and terrorists and 460 had spent time in prison.

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## **A preacher of the International Church of Scientology was detained in Kaliningrad**

[OVD-Info](#) (01.04.2025) - In Kaliningrad, a preacher of the International Church of Scientology was detained in a criminal case on the organization of the activities of an "undesirable" NGO, the channel "Operational Reports", which [is](#) associated with the security forces, [reports](#).

According to the security forces, the man, using the Intention Personnel Training Center LLC registered to him, organized the activities of the local cell of the International Church of Scientology and studied the materials of American Scientology organizations [recognized as](#) "undesirable" in the Russian Federation: "World Institute of Scientology Enterprises Internationab" (WISE Int.) and "Church of Spiritual Technology". The release states that the detainee has been advising Russians on the methods of these companies for more than 20 years.

During the search, the detainee's literature and personal folders of the students were seized, he himself was sent into custody.

- The religious doctrine of Scientologists [originated](#) in 1952 in the United States. Its founder, American science fiction writer Lafayette Ron Hubbard, developed a spiritual practice called dianetics. Almost immediately after the founding of the church, believers had problems: they were accused of fraud, preaching pseudoscience, financial violations, persecution of apostates and critics of Hubbard's teachings. Trials were held in the USA, Germany, France and Belgium.
- In Russia, Hubbard's book "What is Scientology?" [recognized as](#) extremist material. In September 2021, the Prosecutor General's Office [recognized](#) the World Institute of Scientology Enterprises and the Ron Hubbard Library

undesirable in Russia. In August 2023, a court in St. Petersburg convicted five members of the local Scientology Church, a year later it [was recognized as](#) an extremist organization.

- IC "Sova" considers the prosecution of Scientologists for extremism to be unlawful. "The affirmation of one's own exclusivity is characteristic of any religion, and the persecution of Scientologists and the prohibition of their literature on this basis are unjustified," the Sova website [says](#).

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## **Religious issues and persecution: Bimonthly Digest March 16-31**

### **31.03.2025 - In Konakovo, the court announced the verdict in the case of Jehovah's Witnesses**

Sova - Four believers were sentenced to six years in a colony. The case against another defendant was separated into separate proceedings.

On March 27, 2025, the Konakovsky City Court of the Tver region sentenced four Jehovah's Witnesses - Alexander Starikov, Alexei Kuznetsov, Oleg Katamov and Alexander Shchetinin - six years in a general regime colony, a year of restriction of liberty and three years of ban on activities related to the posting appeals and other materials on the Internet. They were found guilty under Part 1 of Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code (organization of the activities of an extremist organization). The case against another believer Sergei Naumenko was allocated to a separate proceeding, he is accused under the same article.

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### **28.03.2025 - Second jail term for discussing faith during first term**

Forum 18 - Jehovah's Witness Dmitry Terebilov was due for release from his 3-year prison term in September 2024. But he was already being prosecuted for answering a fellow-prisoner's questions about his faith. Using covert recordings, a court in Kostroma jailed him for just over five years for "continuing the activities of a banned extremist organisation". "I cannot understand what evil I have committed and to whom," Terebilov told the court. Neither the court nor the Prosecutor's Office responded to questions. A Vladivostok court jailed two Jehovah's Witness men and handed five women suspended sentences.

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### **26.03.2025 - The case of "illegal missionary work" against a Polish priest was terminated in Noyabrsk**

Sova - In March 2025, it became known that on February 11, the November City Court of the Yamal-Nenets Autonomous District stopped the case of "illegal missionary work" against a Catholic priest from Poland.

Polish citizen Marek Jasczkowski was charged under Part 5 of Art. 5.26 of the Administrative Code (implementation of missionary activity with violations of the requirements of the legislation on freedom of conscience, freedom of religion and religious associations, committed by a foreign citizen) for failure to notify the beginning of the activities of a religious group.

The priest pleaded not guilty. He explained that he is the rector of the Catholic parish of Joseph Truzhnik and comes twice a month at the invitation of his parishioners to conduct worship services. At the same time, only Catholics gather at the service, the priest does not preach among representatives of other faiths.

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### **26.03.2025 - The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom once again recognized Russia as a country of particular concern**

Sova - On March 25, 2025, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) published another annual report. The authors of the report considered the state of religious freedom in Russia unsatisfactory.

The report, in particular, mentions the criminal prosecution of Jehovah's Witnesses and their long prison terms, the persecution of alleged followers of Hiz but-Tahrir in Crimea, followers of Said Nursi, Tabligha Jamaat and other believers under "extremist" articles.

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### **25.03.2025 - Six Jehovah's Witnesses were arrested in Tomsk**

Sova - A case was opened in Tomsk under Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code, six believers were sent to the pre-trial detention center.

On March 20, 2025, six Jehovah's Witnesses were detained and later detained in Tomsk: Evgeny and Yana Abramov, Vladimir Pushkov, Aisula Tastaibekova, Tatiana Dodolina and Evgeny Dodolin (Leonidovich). The Kirovsky District Court of Tomsk chose a preventive measure on March 21.

It is known that Pushkov is accused of organizing the activities of an extremist organization (Part 1 of Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code), and other believers - in participation in it (Part 2 of Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code). Other details of the case have not yet been reported.

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### **25.03.2025 - Jehovah's Witness Saparov from Adygea was approved for a six-year term**

Sova - Nikolai Saparov was found guilty under Part 1 of Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code and sentenced to six years in a colony. The appellate court approved the verdict.

On March 19, 2025, the Supreme Court of Adygea considered an appeal against the sentence of Jehovah's Witness Nikolai Saparov under Part 1 of Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code (organization of the activities of an extremist organization) and left it unchanged.

On January 17, 2024, the Maikop City Court sentenced Saparov to six years in a general regime colony. The court also deprived him of the right to engage in educational activities, as well as activities related to leadership and participation in religious public associations for four years. In addition, he was sentenced to additional punishment in the form of restriction of liberty for a year.



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### **25.03.2025 - A Makhachkala man was fined for distributing a banned book**

Sova - The court fined Ullubiy Hajiyev for distributing the book, which, in our opinion, is illegally banned.

On March 19, 2025, the Soviet District Court of Makhachkala fined one thousand rubles under Art. 20.29 Administrative Code (mass distribution of extremist materials) by Ulluby Hajiyev.

The court found that it "transferred for review and study" the banned book "Mukhtasar Ilmi-Khal. Introduction to Islam". It is not clear from the resolution to whom exactly he transferred it and whether it is really about mass distribution.

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### **24.03.2025 - A resident of Serov was found guilty of insulting the feelings of believers**

Sova - On March 21, 2025, the Serovsky District Court of the Sverdlovsk Region handed down a guilty verdict in the case of Nikolai Pozharuk. He was accused of insulting the religious feelings of believers (part 1 of Art. 148 of the Criminal Code) and illegal storage of explosives (Part 1 of Art. 222.1 of the Criminal Code). What punishment was imposed on him is still unknown.

According to the investigation, an elderly native of Ivano-Frankivsk under the nickname "Avgiyev Stables Cleaner" left comments in VKontakte insulting the religious feelings of Orthodox Christians. The criminal case against him became known on February 8, 2024, the investigator took Pozharuk's obligation to come.

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### **24.03.2025 - A Jehovah's Witness from the village of Kholmskaya died in the pre-trial detention center of Novorossiysk**

Sova - Earlier, the believer Valery Bailo from the village of Kholmskaya was sentenced to two and a half years in a colony under Part 2 of Art. 282.2 UK.

On March 22, 2025, it became known that a 67-year-old Jehovah's Witness, a former employee of a maximum security colony, Valery Bailo, died in the Novorossiysk pre-trial detention center. According to his lawyer, Bailo has complained of health and exacerbation of chronic diseases since his detention, but he has not received medical care. The lawyer suggests that due to the lack of treatment for stomach disease, Bailo died of exhaustion and seeks to investigate the circumstances of the death of his client.

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### **24.03.2025 - In Tuapse, a minister of the EHB church was fined for "illegal missionary work"**

Sova - On March 12, 2025, the World Court of the Bryukhovetsky District of the Krasnodar Territory fined Sergei Tymoshchuk, a minister of the Church of the International Union of Evangelical Christian Baptist Churches (MSC EHB), for "illegal missionary work".

The court found him guilty under Part 4 of Art. 5.26 of the Administrative Code (implementation of missionary activity in violation of the requirements of the legislation on freedom of conscience, freedom of religion and religious associations) and imposed a penalty in the form of a fine of five thousand rubles.

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### **18.03.2025 - Russia bans local church publication as "extremist"**

Bitter Winter - On March 7, 2025, Russian media reported that the Moscow City Court declared "extremist" the book "New Testament: The Restoration Translation," distributed by the Local Church founded by Chinese preacher Witness Lee.

The court found that the comments by Witness Lee on what it called a "non-canonical translation of the New Testament" contain signs of "exclusivism," a frequent Russian accusation against groups banned as "extremist." "Exclusivism" means implying that the Biblical interpretation by Witness Lee is superior to others, including the one by the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC).

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## **Religious issues and persecution: Bimonthly Digest March 01-15**

### **13.03.2025 - A resident of Glazov brought up on biblical principles was denied alternative civilian service**

Susarin News - Glazov. Udmurtia. The Glazovsky District Court of Udmurtia recognized the decision of the draft commission to refuse to replace military service by conscription with alternative civil service. This is reported by the Joint Press Service of the courts of the republic.

The lawsuit was filed by a 20-year-old citizen claiming that military service contradicts his religion and beliefs. The conscript committee refused him alternative service.

After going to court, the young man indicated that he was born into a family of believers, his parents gave him an upbringing on the basis of Biblical principles, in accordance with his personal beliefs, personal faith in God and religion he accepted holy water baptism.

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### **13.03.2025 - A case on financing an undesirable organization has been initiated in Severodvinsk**

Sova - In early March 2025, in Severodvinsk, Arkhangelsk region, a criminal case was initiated against a local resident under Part 2 of Art. 284.1 of the Criminal Code (provision or collection of funds or provision of financial services knowingly intended to ensure the activities of a foreign or international organization in respect of which a decision has been made to recognize its activities as undesirable on the territory of the Russian Federation in accordance with the legislation of the Russian Federation).

According to the investigation, from the beginning of 2022 to February 2025, she transferred about 150 thousand rubles to the All-Ukrainian Spiritual Center "Revival", recognized as undesirable on the territory of Russia.

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### **13.03.2025 - In Bryansk, a foreign student was fined and expelled from the country for "illegal missionary work"**

Sova - On March 12, 2025, it became known that in Bryansk a foreign student of one of the local educational institutions was fined for "illegal missionary work" and expelled from the country.

According to the media, a 19-year-old young man organized a prayer room in the dormitory. The court sentenced him to a fine of 30 thousand rubles and administrative expulsion. Apparently, we are talking about punishment under Art. 5.26 of the Administrative Code (implementation of missionary activity with violations of the requirements of the legislation on freedom of conscience, freedom of religion and religious associations, committed by a foreign citizen).

### **11.03.2025 - A resident of Dagestan was fined for keeping Muslim books at home**

Sova - During the search, a resident of Dagestan found the "Fortress of a Muslim" and a semantic translation of the Koran, the publication of which the court identified with the banned volume of tafsir as-Saadi.

On February 28, 2025, the Kaitagsky District Court of the Republic of Dagestan fined a thousand rubles under Art. 20.29 Administrative Code (storage of extremist materials for the purpose of mass distribution) by Magomedshapi Abdusalamov.

Abdusalamov's house was searched, during which the book "The Fortress of a Muslim" and the publication "Quran. Semantic translation by Elmir Kuliev". The court decided to destroy these books.

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### **11.03.2025 -The sentence of Jehovah's Witnesses from Blagoveshchensk was approved**

Sova - The believers were found guilty of participating in the activities of an extremist organization.

On March 10, 2025, the Amur Regional Court approved the verdict of four followers of the teachings of Jehovah's Witnesses from Blagoveshchensk.

On December 6, 2024, the Blagoveshchensky City Court of the Amur Region sentenced the followers of Jehovah's Witnesses **Kristina Golik** and **Valentina Ermilova** to two and a half years, and **Maria Myasnikova** and **Ekaterina Olshevskaya** to two years and two months in prison, replacing this punishment with forced labor for the same period with a deduction of 10% of wages to the state income. In addition, they were given an additional punishment in the form of restriction of liberty for six months after the end of forced labor.

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### **11.03.2025 - A Greek Catholic parish was liquidated in Omsk**

Sova - On May 22, 2024, the Omsk Regional Court satisfied the claim of the regional department of the Ministry of Justice to liquidate the local Greek Catholic parish of the Intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, whose servant is charged under two articles of the Criminal Code. The reason for the liquidation was certain gross violations of federal legislation.

Violations that the Ministry of Justice considered irrevocable were "identified during a joint inspection of the department, the prosecutor's office of the Omsk region and the Federal Security Service of the Omsk region".

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### **11.03.2025 - A citizen of Uzbekistan was fined in Kirov for "illegal missionary work"**

Sova - On March 5, 2025, the Oktyabrsky District Court of Kirov fined a citizen of Uzbekistan Nurillo Mukhtorzhon Ugli Rakhmonaliyev for "illegal missionary work".

The court found him guilty under Part 5 of Art. 5.26 of the Administrative Code (implementation of missionary activity in violation of the requirements of the legislation on freedom of conscience, freedom of religion and religious associations, committed by a foreign citizen) and imposed a penalty in the form of a fine of 30 thousand rubles.

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### **10.03.2025 - The government gave a negative response to the draft amendments to the law "On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations"**

Sova - The People's Assembly of Dagestan proposed to indefinitely deprive the leadership of banned organizations of the creation of religious associations, to oblige the branches of the Ministry of Justice to coordinate the registration of religious organizations with regional authorities, as well as to leave the right to distribute religious literature and religious items only to centralized religious organizations. The government did not support the bill.

On December 24, 2024, the People's Assembly of the Republic of Dagestan submitted to the State Duma a draft amendment to the law "On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations".

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### **24.01.2025 - An action against the construction of a mosque in Verkhnyaya Kurya was held in Perm**

Sova - On February 23, 2025, it became known that opponents of the construction of a mosque in the Perm microdistrict of Verkhnyaya Kurya held a protest action in early February: they installed snowmen on the construction site, dressed them in nikabs and attached offensive slogans to them.

Among the posters that the snowmen "held" were: "To the snow women on the nikab", "I agree to the harem with the refrigerator", "Give me a hot Muslim", "I'll cool the ardor of any migrant", "White women for black guests", etc.

A criminal case was opened against the organizer of the action Anna Pyanzina under Art. 282 of the Criminal Code (incitement to hatred). The local Center "E" is doing the case.

### **07.03.2025 - The case of the pastor of the church of the HVE, who allowed anti-war statements in the sermon, is being investigated in the Moscow region**

Sova - On October 18, 2024, law enforcement officers detained the pastor of the Holy Trinity Church of Christians of the Evangelical Faith in Balashikha Nikolai Romanyuk. A criminal case was opened against him under Art. 280.4 of the Criminal Code (public calls for activities directed against state security). On October 20, the court placed him in a pre-trial detention center.

During the search, the pastor was hit on the head with a butt, although he did not resist. As a result, he was deaf in one ear. Later it became known that Romanyuk had a microstroke in the detention center.

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### **07.03.2025 - Grigory Mikhnov-Vaitenko was in case for discrediting the army**

Sova - On March 5, 2025, the Nevsky District Court of St. Petersburg received a case under Part 1 of Art. 20.3.3 of the Administrative Code (public actions aimed at discrediting the use of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation in order to protect the interests of the Russian Federation and its citizens, maintain international peace and security, including public calls to prevent the use of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation for these purposes) against the priest of the Apostolic Orthodox Church Grigory Mikhnov-Vaitenko.

Earlier, a case was opened against him for not reprising himself as a foreign agent.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **06.03.2025 - A Jehovah's Witness from Kaltan was sentenced to six years in the colony**

Sova - Believer **Alexander Tsikunov** was found guilty under Part 1 of Art. 282.2 UK. On March 6, 2025, the Kaltansky District Court of the Kemerovo Region sentenced Jehovah's Witness Alexander Tsikunov to six years in a general regime colony. He was found guilty under Part 1 of Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code (organization of the activities of an extremist organization). After the verdict was announced, the convict was taken into custody in the courtroom.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **03.03.2025 - In Sakhalin, the court sentenced Jehovah's Witness to six years in prison**

Sova - **Daler Tokhtaev** from Poronaysk was found guilty under the ch. 1.1 and 2 Art. 282.2 UK.

On February 28, 2025, the Poronai City Court of the Sakhalin Region sentenced Jehovah's Witness Daler Tokhtayev to six years in prison with a general regime colony on the terms of honor. 1.1 and 2 Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code (involvement in and participation in the activities of an extremist organization).

Tokhtaev's case was initiated on February 6, 2024. On April 3, Tokhtaev was searched, after which he was detained. The court placed the accused in a pre-trial detention center. On October 2, 2024, the case was submitted to court. On January 15, 2025, during the debate of the parties, the state prosecutor asked to sentence Tokhtaev to eight years in

[Continue reading...](#)

## **A Jehovah's Witness sentenced by the Supreme Court of Adygea to 6 years in a penal colony**

***The prosecutor's request in 2024 was 9 years of detention for holding religious meetings online***

[JW-Russia](#) (11.03.2025) – On 10 March 2025, the Supreme Court of Adygea confirmed the previous verdict issued against Inver Siyukhov: 6 years in a penal colony.

The Jehovah's Witness attended the hearing via video conferencing from his pre-trial detention center. As he had spent almost four years there, he is expected to be released in a month as pre-trial detention periods are multiplied by 1 ½

Siyukhov sought to overturn [the verdict](#) due to numerous irregularities committed by the court of first instance.

The Court of Appeal slightly changed the sentence only in terms of additional punishment—the ban on engaging in educational activities was reduced from 4 years to 1 year.

It takes many Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia [years](#) to prove their innocence in court, but in most cases to no avail. At the same time, human rights activists in Russia and abroad note that these people are persecuted solely because of their faith.

### **The facts in brief**

Operational-search measures against Inver Siyukhov from Maykop have been carried out, presumably, since 2018.

In April 2021, he was arrested after a search of his house and placed in a pre-trial detention center. The investigation considered the holding of religious meetings using the Internet to be an activity of an extremist organization.

In September 2021, Siyukhov's case went to court. At the hearings, several witnesses mixed up their testimonies, and their words differed from the information from the interrogation protocols. Also at the hearings, it turned out that the psycholinguistic examination on which the accusation was based, was carried out by an expert who did not have proper qualifications.

In February 2024, the prosecutor requested a sentence of 9 years in a penal colony. A month later, the court sentenced him to 6 years in a penal colony. In March 2025, the appellate court upheld the verdict.

See the timeline of his case [HERE](#)

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## **Religious issues and persecution: Bimonthly Digest February 16-28**

### **27.02.2025 - A Jehovah's Witness from the village of Pavlovskaya was sentenced to imprisonment**

Sova - On February 25, 2025, the Pavlovsky District Court of the Krasnodar Territory sentenced Jehovah's Witness **Alexander Davydenko**. The court found him guilty of participating in the activities of an extremist organization (Part 2 of Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code) and four episodes of involvement in the activities of this organization (p. 1.1 Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code) and sentenced to four years and two months of imprisonment in a general regime colony. He was also sentenced to imprisonment for one year and eight months.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **26.02.2025 - The case of a preacher from the Sverdlovsk region was submitted to the court**

Sova - On February 14, 2025, the Central District Military Court registered a criminal case against **Eduard Charov**, a preacher from Krasnoufimsk. He is accused under Part 1 of Art. 280.3 of the Criminal Code (re-discrediting the exercise of their powers by Russian state bodies abroad) and Part 2 of Art. 205.2 of the Criminal Code (public justification of terrorism on the Internet).

The criminal case against Charov became known in February 2024 - then he was accused only under Art. 205.2 OF THE CRIMINAL CODE. The court placed the preacher under house arrest. The reason for the case was an approving comment under the post with the news about the arson of the military registration and enlistment office - in the message Charov proposed to award the arsonist with the medal "For Courage".

[Continue reading...](#)

### **26.02.2025 - The sentence of twenty Jehovah's Witnesses from Surgut has been approved**

Sova - On February 21, 2025, the Court of the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous District approved the verdict in the case of twenty Jehovah's Witnesses. On December 5, 2023, the Surgut City Court of the KhMAO sentenced the faithful to various suspended terms of imprisonment. Depending on the role of each of them, the defendants in the case were charged under Parts 1, 2 of Art. 282.2 (organization of the activities of an extremist organization or participation in it), Part 1 of Art. 282.3 Criminal Code (financing of extremist activities).

According to Jehovah's Witnesses, the court imposed the following punishments on eighteen defendants:

7 years of suspended imprisonment - **Sergei Loginov and Timofey Zhukov**;  
6 years and 10 months - **Evgeny Kairyak...**

[Continue reading...](#)

### 24.02.2025 - Ten brothers in Russia sentenced

JW - On February 13, 2025, the Yoshkar-Ola City Court of the Republic of Mari El convicted and fined ten brothers. Brothers Igor Alekseyev, Ilya Buryi, Eduard Kapitonov, Ilya Kapitonov, Aleksey Kulikov, Sergey Kulikov, Sergey Naymushin, Denis Petrov, and Vladimir Usenko were each fined 600,000 rubles (\$6,569 U.S.). Brother Yevgeniy Plotnikov was fined 500,000 rubles (\$5,474 U.S.).

[Continue reading...](#)

### 24.02.2025 - The prosecution asks to impose suspended sentences on Jehovah's Witnesses from Kurilsk

Sova - On February 13, 2025, during the debate in the Yuzhno-Sakhalin City Court, the prosecutor asked to appoint **Olga Kalinnikova** and Larisa Potapova, followers of Jehovah's Witnesses, five and a half years of suspended imprisonment, followed by one and a half years of restriction of liberty by Chch. 1.1 and 2 Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code (involvement of a person in the activities of an extremist organization and participation in one).

[Continue reading...](#)

### 24.01.2025 - An action against the construction of a mosque in Verkhnyaya Kurya was held in Perm

Sova - On February 23, 2025, it became known that opponents of the construction of a mosque in the Perm microdistrict of Verkhnyaya Kurya held a protest action in early February: they installed snowmen on the construction site, dressed them in nikabs and attached offensive slogans to them.

Among the posters that the snowmen "held" were: "To the snow women on the nikab", "I agree to the harem with the refrigerator", "Give me a hot Muslim", "I'll cool the ardor of any migrant", "White women for black guests", etc.

A criminal case was opened against the organizer of the action Anna Pyanzina under Art. 282 of the Criminal Code (incitement to hatred). The local Center "E" is doing the case.

### 21.02.2025 - In Cherkessk, Jehovah's Witness was sentenced to a long term of imprisonment

Sova - On February 20, 2025, the Cherkess City Court of Karachay-Cherkessia sentenced Jehovah's Witness **Evgeny Semenov** under the Chch. 1, 1.1 and 2 Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code (organization, participation and inclination of persons in the activities of an extremist organization). He was sentenced to six years and three months in a general regime colony.

[Continue reading...](#)

### 20.02.2025 - "I Have Jehovah With Me"



JW - On February 20, 2025, the Cherkessk City Court of the Karachayevo-Circassian Republic convicted Brother Yevgeniy Semenov and sentenced him to six years and three months in prison. He remains in custody.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **20.02.2025 - A Jehovah's Witness from the Krasnoyarsk Territory was again sentenced to suspended imprisonment**

Sova - **Alexander Kabanov** was again sentenced to two years of suspended imprisonment. His case has been going on since 2019.

On February 18, 2025, the Zelenogorsk City Court of the Krasnoyarsk Territory considered the case of Jehovah's Witness Alexander Kabanov for the second time. He was found guilty again under Part 2 of Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code (participation in the activities of an extremist organization) and sentenced him to two years of suspended imprisonment with a two-year probationary period. As an additional punishment, the court imposed a six-month restriction of liberty.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **18.02.2025- The case of the pastor of the church of the HVE, who allowed anti-war statements in the sermon, is being investigated in the Moscow region**

Sova - On October 18, 2024, law enforcement officers detained the pastor of the Holy Trinity Church of Christians of the Evangelical Faith in Balashikha Nikolai Romanyuk. A criminal case was opened against him under Art. 280.4 of the Criminal Code (public calls for activities directed against state security). On October 20, the court placed him in a pre-trial detention center.

During the search, the pastor was hit on the head with a butt, although he did not resist. As a result, he was deaf in one ear. Later it became known that Romanyuk had a microstroke in the detention center.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **17.02.2025 - The Altai Regional Court recalculated the sentence of Jehovah's Witness from Barnaul**

Sova - Believer **Vitaly Manuylov** was previously found guilty under Part 2 of Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code and sentenced to forced labor.

On February 14, 2025, the Altai Regional Court partially satisfied the complaint of Jehovah's Witness Vitaly Manuilov against the conviction, which was handed down to him by the Industrial District Court of Barnaul on November 19, 2024, sentencing him two years of forced labor under Part 2 of Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code (participation in the activities of an extremist organization) with subsequent restriction of liberty for six months. The regional court recalculated Manuylov's remaining sentence and came to the conclusion that 10 months of forced labor should be considered served.

[Continue reading...](#)

## Religious issues and persecution: Bimonthly Digest February 01-15

### 13.02.2025 - The "Russian community" is outraged by the possible appearance of a Muslim prayer house in Balashikha

Sova - On February 13, 2025, the "Russian Community" reported that in Balashikha near Moscow, the city administration is agreeing on the purchase of a building by the Muslim community for a prayer house. The funds for the purchase of the local religious organization of Muslims "Iman" were allegedly allocated by the Spiritual Administration of Muslims.

Activists of the "Russian Community" are concerned about the fact that the alleged prayer house is located next to the kindergarten and the defense-industrial facility "Kryogenmash", and public hearings on the issue of providing the building to a religious organization were not held. According to the "community members", "the competent authorities should urgently check this information and give a legal assessment of the decision of the Balashikha administration to establish a religious object in the specified place".

[Continue reading...](#)

### 13.02.2025 - Court ruled in the case of Valeriy Klokov, Jehovah's Witness from Altai territory: 3 years in Penal Colony

JW - On February 7, 2025, Dmitriy Malikov, judge of the Industrialnyy District Court of Barnaul, sentenced **Valeriy Klokov** to 3 years imprisonment. The court considered statements about the need to live according to God's commandments as "propaganda of exclusivity and superiority... of Jehovah's Witnesses."

Klokov faced criminal prosecution in July 2023. Then the Directorate of the Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation for the Altai Territory initiated a criminal case against him. The believer's home was searched, he was sent to a temporary detention facility for 2 days, and then placed under house arrest for 1 year.

[Continue reading...](#)

### 12.02.2025 - Jehovah's Witness, who refused to be drafted into the army, sentenced to three years in prison

Khpg - On January 27, 2025, **Vitaliy Kriushenko** began serving a three-year prison sentence. According to the organization's website, he became the first Jehovah's Witness to be imprisoned for refusing military service from the beginning of a full-scale Russian invasion. The case was reported on the Jehovah's Witnesses website JW.ORG, the Witnesses Facebook page and the Human Rights Without Frontiers (HRW) website.

[Continue reading...](#)

### 12.02.2025 - A foreign citizen was fined and expelled from the country for prayer in a Moscow hostel

Sova - On January 31, 2025, the Kuzminsky District Court of Moscow fined Ruzimhammad Hasanjon Ugli Kosimov for "illegal missionary work" and expelled him from the country.

The court found that on January 29, a foreign citizen Kosimov in the lobby of the Mosotel hostel "in the absence of appropriate authority to conduct a religious rite, acted as an imam in a public place not intended for worship and religious rites, <...> carried out the Muslim religious rite "Namaza".

[Continue reading...](#)

### **12.02.2025- The Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky City Court held a debate on the Jehovah's Witness case**

Sova - The prosecutor asked the court to sentence Alexei Ovchar to a long term of imprisonment under Part 1 of Art. 282.2 UK.

On February 10, 2025, during the debate on the case of Jehovah's Witness Alexei Ovchar in the Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky City Court, the prosecutor asked the court to assign the accused six 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).

A criminal case against Elena and Sergei Chechulin and Alexei Ovchar was initiated in Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky on September 25, 2022. The believers were accused of holding religious meetings and services. Ovchar was taken a subscription not to travel as a suspect, his wife became a witness in the case.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **11.02.2025 - In Kuban, a Baptist minister was fined for "illegal missionary work"**

Sova - On January 25, 2025, it became known that on December 15, 2024, in Kurganinsk, Krasnodar Territory, two cases were opened against Baptist minister Alexander Chmykh: under Part 2 of Art. 7 of the Federal Law "On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations" and under Part 4 of Art. 5.25 Administrative Code (implementation of missionary activities in violation of the requirements of the legislation).

The reason for drawing up the protocols was the Baptist worship service in a private house without notification of the creation of a religious group.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **06.02.2025 - Krasnodar Court sends music teacher with disability to penal colony for practicing his faith**

JW - On February 4, 2025, the Sovetskiy District Court of Krasnodar sentenced **Aleksey Lelikov**, 64, to 6.5 years in a penal colony. Judge Irina Klyuyeva considered holding meetings for worship of Jehovah's Witnesses to be organizing the activity of an extremist organization. The believer was taken into custody in the courtroom.

"I cannot agree to admit my guilt and call myself an extremist, even if it would benefit me," Lelikov said in his final statement, "because then it would mean that worshipping God is a crime. For me, this is tantamount to denying God and his son Jesus, who have nothing to do with any form of extremism."

[Continue reading...](#)

### **06.02.2025 - Court of Appeal in Udmurtia replaces suspended sentences of two Jehovah's Witnesses from Izhevsk with imprisonment**

JW - The appeal hearing in the case of **Aleksandr Votyakov** and **Yevgeniy Stefanidin** ended with a tougher sentence. On February 4, 2025, the Supreme Court of the Udmurt Republic sided with the prosecutor's office and sent the believers to a penal colony: Aleksandr for 6.5 years, and Yevgeniy for 6 years.

During the trial, the defense filed a motion to recuse A. R. Kudryavtsev, one of the judges of the panel. Previously, he was involved in cases against believers from Izhevsk and Votkinsk. According to the defense, he "had already formed his opinion about Jehovah's Witnesses and cannot be impartial and objective in the consideration of this criminal case." The court, however, rejected the motion.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **05.02.2025 - Court in Khabarovsk territory gave 78-year-old woman a suspended sentence for letters about God**

Sova - The court found **Liliya Dolinina**, a pensioner from the village of Dormidontovka, guilty of extremism because she wrote letters to a woman on spiritual topics. On February 3, 2025, Judge Kseniya Matviyevskaya gave the elderly believer a 4.5-year suspended sentence.

The charge was based on Liliya's letters, which she wrote to her son's friend, I. Lavrenova. According to the believer, her motive was wanting to support this woman. "My goal was to help her come to know God and the advice he gives to people through the Bible," Liliya said in court. "I just wanted her to enjoy a happy family life with my son." However, the prosecution regarded this correspondence as an attempt to involve Lavrenova in an extremist organization.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **05.02.2025 - The Ministry of Justice demands to liquidate a Muslim organization in Kurgan**

Sova - On February 4, 2025, it became known that the Department of the Ministry of Justice for the Kurgan region appealed to the regional court with a suit to liquidate the local religious organization of Muslims of Kurgan.

The Ministry of Justice demands to exclude the organization from the Unified State Register of Legal Entities, referring to some violations identified in the activities of the MROM. At the same time, journalists mention "former security forces" as a source of information.

### **03.02.2025 - Court in Vladivostok passed verdict in case of seven of Jehovah's Witnesses.**

JW - On February 3, 2025, the Pervorechenskiy District Court sentenced Jehovah's Witnesses from Vladivostok to various terms, even up to 7 years imprisonment. Judge Galina Vasilkevich deemed peaceful religious activity to be extremism. Previously the

husband of one of the defendants, Dmitriy Barmakin, was sentenced to 8 years in a penal colony on similar charges.

**Igor Lonchakov** was sentenced to 7 years imprisonment, **Yuriy Redozubov** — to 6.5 years. The women were given suspended sentences: **Yekaterina Treguba** and **Lyudviga Katanaeva** — 3 years and 4 months each with a 3-year probation period; **Yelena Barmakina, Yelena Tsorn** and 65-year-old Nina **Astvatsaturova** — 3 years each with a 3-year probation period.

[Continue reading...](#)

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## Religious issues and persecution: Bimonthly Digest January 16-31

### 31.01.2025 - In the Orenburg region, the court liquidated the church of Evangelical Christians

Sova - On January 29, 2025, it became known that the Orenburg Regional Court satisfied the claim of the regional administration and liquidated the local religious organization "Christian Church of Evangelical Christians" (Church of the Living God) of Mednogorsk.

During the scheduled verification of documents, the Ministry of Justice found that "the charter of the organization does not meet the requirements of the legislation of the Russian Federation, as it contains an indication of membership in a religious organization. There are no signs of a religious organization in the activities of the administrative defendant, since the documents confirming the relevant activities are not submitted for verification".

The court liquidated the organization and excluded it from the unified state register of legal entities.

### 30.01.2025 - A case on the activities of Jehovah's Witnesses has been opened in North Ossetia

Sova - Inspections of the premises were held at three families of believers.

On January 23, 2025, in North Ossetia, investigative authorities conducted inspections of Jehovah's Witnesses. The Republican SU of the Investigative Committee of Russia reported that a criminal case had been initiated under Part 1 of Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code (organization of the activities of an extremist organization) against a local resident.

According to the investigation, from June 2022 to January 2024, knowing about the ban of Jehovah's Witnesses organizations, including the local religious organization of Jehovah's Witnesses in Vladikavkaz, the suspect organized meetings via the Internet and at these online meetings "propagated the ideas of a banned religious organization".

[Continue reading...](#)

### **29.01.2025 - Criminal case for faith has been initiated in Vladikavkaz.**

JW - In the early morning of January 23, 2025, in Vladikavkaz and the village of Nogir (Republic of North Ossetia—Alania), representatives of the intelligence services inspected the homes of three families of Jehovah's Witnesses. A criminal case has been initiated.

At about 6 a.m., 15 people arrived at the apartment of one of the believers. The senior investigator leading the inspection of the home explained that the reason was that the family belonged to the religion of Jehovah's Witnesses. Electronic equipment and a Bible were confiscated from the family. After interrogations, the believers were released.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **25.01.2025 - Court sends Dmitriy Terebilov back to penal colony for practicing his religion**

JW - On January 23, 2024 the Sverdlovsk District Court of Kostroma issued a second guilty verdict against Dmitriy Terebilov - 5 years and 5 days in a penal colony with a strict regime. Judge Dmitriy Gorokhov deemed conversations about the Bible as involving other convicted persons in the activity of an extremist organization.

In the fall of 2021, the believer was sentenced to 3 years in a strict regime penal colony for practicing the religion of Jehovah's Witnesses. Terebilov served his sentence in full, but was not released — another criminal case was initiated against him under an article for extremism in the spring of 2023. The charge was based on the testimony of a cellmate who feigned an interest in the Bible, to the effect that the believer only answered the man's questions about his religious beliefs.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **25.01.2025 - Five Jehovah's Witnesses sentenced to two years in jail in Algeria for sharing their faith**

Bitter Winter - On December 2, 2024, the Tirzi Ouzou Court in Algeria has sentenced five Jehovah's Witnesses to two years of imprisonment plus a fine of 100,000 Algerian dinars "for the offense of inciting a Muslim to change religion and the offense of undermining national unity."

That the defendants spoke about religion with Muslims is probably true, although there is no direct evidence of that in the judgment, no evidence of conversion, and no witness who affirms it. The problem is that in Algeria, while speaking about religion is allowed, especially for Muslims, inciting people to change their religion is not allowed by the law. What makes a difference between speaking about religion and inciting to change one's religion?

[Continue reading...](#)

### **24.01.2025- Moscow continues targeting Christians in Russian-occupied territories**

Christianity today - President Donald Trump repeatedly claimed on the campaign trail that he could end the Ukraine war within 24 hours of taking office. He failed to deliver but on Wednesday issued on social media an ultimatum to Russian president Vladimir Putin: End the war or risk "Taxes, Tariffs, and Sanctions."

Trump's tough stance against the Kremlin doesn't mean Ukraine is off the hook. The president's administration hasn't revealed which concessions it will request from Kyiv, and Putin will undoubtedly negotiate for sovereignty over territory he has occupied and illegally annexed.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **24.01.2025 - Getting Alternative Civilian Service "a hellishly difficult task"**

Forum 18 - Military officials deny many young men Alternative Civilian Service (ACS), rather than military service, despite their demonstrating their pacifist convictions. A Krasnoyarsk Region court fined Baptist conscientious objector Zakhar Asmalovsky three weeks' average wages in November 2024. He is appealing against the conviction. German Strelkov, another Baptist, is on his fourth round of legal proceedings to try to realise his right to conscientious objection. "After the war began, the situation changed dramatically, and now it has become very difficult to obtain ACS," Seventh-day Adventist Andrey Bondarenko told Forum 18.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **21.01.2025 - Father of child with disability given suspended sentence for his faith**

JW - On January 20, 2025, Galina Yevsegneyeva, judge of the Urupskiy District Court of the Karachayevo-Circassian Republic, issued a verdict in the case of Aleksey Pasyukov: 6-year suspended sentence. The court considered reading the Bible with fellow believers to be extremist activity.

Aleksey does not agree with the decision and thinks that the court has not cited a single fact proving his guilt. He noted that the panel of experts did not find any signs of extremism in the material presented for their study. Witnesses for the prosecution are either not acquainted with the defendant or testify based on hearsay.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **21.01.2025 - Searches, interrogations with use of force, and detentions**

JW - On January 17, 2025, in the city of Ozersk, Chelyabinsk Region, five apartments of Jehovah's Witnesses were searched. The raid was launched by the Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation for the Chelyabinsk Region, which initiated a criminal case against Anton Parfenov under Article 282.2(1) of the RF CrC. Four men were detained.

The searches began at about 5:30 a.m. and lasted between 2.5 and 4 hours. Demanding passwords for electronic devices, law enforcement officers beat two men. The security forces, some of them wearing masks and carrying automatic weapons, seized Bibles, phones and laptops, personal notes, and photographs. In some cases, they tried to persuade the believers not to use Article 51 of the RF Constitution, which gives the right not to testify against yourself or your relatives.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **20.01.2025 - In Sakhalin, Jehovah's Witnesses are asked to be sentenced to eight years in prison**

Sova - On January 15, 2025, the debate of the parties in the case of Jehovah's Witness Daler Tokhtayev began in the Poronai City Court of the Sakhalin Region. The state prosecutor asks to sentence him to eight years in prison. 1.1 and 2 Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code (involvement in and participation in the activities of an extremist organization).

Tokhtaev's case was initiated on February 6, 2024. On April 3, Tokhtaev was searched, after which he was detained. The court placed the accused in a pre-trial detention center. According to the investigation, a resident of Poronaisk since February 2023, being on the territory of the Sakhalin region, held religious talks with local residents and "propagated extremist ideology". Tokhtaev himself claims that the person he talked to was an FSB provocateur.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **20.01.2025 - An Islamic school was closed in Simferopol by court decision**

Sova - On December 20, 2024, it became known that a private house in which a Muslim educational institution operated was sealed in Simferopol by a court decision. On December 9, the Central District Court of Simferopol suspended the operation of the building.

According to the Telegram channel "PE Feodosia (Crimea)", the school was created by a Muslim organization that was not under the jurisdiction of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Crimea and "has connections with foreign ideologues". The educational institution "used children to mislead their parents, in order to involve them in illegal actions and expand their influence in the community".

[Continue reading...](#)

### **16.01.2025 - A new criminal case has been opened against the Omsk pastor**

Sova - At the end of December 2024, it became known that a case was initiated against the pastor of the New Creation Church in Omsk Stanislav Moskvitin under Part 3 of Art. 284.1 of the Criminal Code (organization of the activities of a foreign or international organization in respect of which a decision was made to recognize its activities as undesirable on the territory of the Russian Federation in accordance with the legislation of the Russian Federation).

[Continue reading...](#)

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## **Religious issues and persecution: Bimonthly Digest January 01-15**

### **15.01.2025 - Each given 6 years in a Penal Colony for "expressing gratitude" at religious meetings.**

JW - The Gagarinskiy District Court sentenced **Viktor Kudinov** and **Sergey Zhigalov** to 6 years in a penal colony. This verdict was announced on January 14, 2025, by Judge Sergey Korotun. He deemed holding meetings for worship, permitted by law, extremism. More than 100 people came to the courthouse to support the believers.



According to the defense, Kudinov and Zhigalov were groundlessly regarded as criminals. The indictment states that the defendants participated "in organizing and conducting [meetings for worship], by scheduling tasks for other participants, calling on them to comment, as well as subsequently expressing gratitude for these comments." Sergey Zhigalov, 53, refuted the charges in his final statement: "The video from the services is proof that I love my brothers and sisters in faith, worship God peacefully and fulfill his commandment 'let us not forsake our meeting together..., but let us encourage one another' as written in the Bible."

[Continue reading...](#)

### **13.01.2025 - The court liquidated the Muslim community in Kotelniki**

Sova - On January 11, 2025, it became known that the Moscow Regional Court satisfied the claim of the Ministry of Justice and liquidated the local religious organization of Muslims in Kotelniki near Moscow and excluded it from the Unified State Register of Legal Entities.

The premises of the prayer house, the closure of which has been demanded for several years by local residents and the "Russian Community", is sealed.

A criminal case under Art. 173.1 of the Criminal Code (illegal formation (creation, reorganization) of a legal entity).

### **13.01.2025 - Crimean Tatar sentenced by Russia to 19 years for 'religious dissidence' hurled into punishment cell for prayer**

khpg - While Russian murderers and other real criminals are given pardons, freedom and lavish payments to go and fight against Ukraine, Crimean Tatar and other Ukrainian political prisoners get thrown into punishment cells without any grounds and face constant harassment.

Muslim Aliev, a recognized political prisoner and Amnesty International prisoner of conscience, has lodged a formal appeal against the most recent such attack. On 12 December 2024, Aliev was sentenced to 15 days in the horrific conditions of a Russian SHIZO [punishment cell] . The pretext for this was that he, fellow Crimean Tatar political prisoner Teymur Abdullayev and two other Muslims, had not interrupted their morning prayers when the head of the prison colony entered his cell.

[Continue reading...](#)

### **09.01.2025 - The International Alliance for Religious Freedom is recognized as an undesirable organization**

Sova - On December 29, 2024, the Prosecutor General's Office recognized the activities of the international organization International Religious Freedom or Belief Alliance (IRFBA) as undesirable on the territory of the Russian Federation.

Established in 2020, the alliance fights discrimination and persecution on the basis of religion and unites 42 countries.

The Prosecutor General's Office is confident that "in fact, the association is a platform serving the interests of the United States and its allies, participates in the implementation of measures to discredit the domestic and foreign policy of the Russian authorities, destabilize the socio-political situation in our country. Produces materials about alleged violations of freedom of religion in Russia to increase sanctions pressure on the Russian Federation".

### **09.01.2025- "Halal" and "Samarkand" cafes burned down in Ramensky district**

Sova - In the Ramensky district of the Moscow region, teenagers in masks on camera set fire to two cafes - "Halal" and "Samarkand".

On January 7, 2025, in the Ramensky district of the Moscow region, two teenagers in masks set fire to two roadside cafes. They filmed their actions. The buildings were almost completely destroyed by fire.

At first, the teenagers broke the windows in the Halal and Samarkand cafes, and then threw Molotov cocktails into the buildings. The buildings caught fire, and the teenagers ran away. Both snack bars are located at the entrance to the village of Kuntsevo. Nothing was reported about the victims.

### **09.01.2025 - A resident of Mordovia was sentenced to compulsory labor for cooperation with Falun Gong**

Sova - On December 27, 2024, it became known that the Lyambirsky District Court of the Republic of Mordovia brought a resident of this district I. Maksinyaev is convicted of Falun Gong cooperation.

The court found him guilty under Part 3 of Art. 284.1 (organization of the activities of a foreign or international organization, in respect of which it was decided to recognize its activities as undesirable on the territory of the Russian Federation in accordance with the legislation of the Russian Federation) and imposed a penalty of 400 hours of compulsory work.

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### **09.01.2025 - Data on visitors to Christmas services in 2025**

Sova - On January 7, 2025, the Russian Orthodox Church celebrated the Nativity of Christ. We provide statistical data of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Rosgvardia on the visit of festive services in different regions.

In Moscow, according to Vitaly Suchkov, Head of the Department of National Policy and Interregional Relations, more than 1.5 million people attended the holiday services.

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### **02.01.2025 - Statistics about the harsh repression of Jehovah's Witnesses in 2024**

The European Times - As of December 16, 2024, since the beginning of the year, Russian security forces have conducted at least 96 searches in the homes of Jehovah's Witnesses — 17 in Crimea being the highest number. The total number of raids since the ban in 2017 reached 2157.

During 2024, 41 persons were made defendants in new criminal cases, of which 19 went through various types of detention, 15 of them are still behind bars. Last year, criminal cases were initiated against 100 believers.

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## Statistics about the harsh repression of Jehovah's Witnesses in 2024

***From the point of view of the Russian judicial system, Jehovah's Witnesses are more dangerous than any other religious group. Over 140 prisoners and record sentences of over 8 years.***

**[The European Times](#) (02.01.2025) - As of December 16, 2024, since the beginning of the year, Russian security forces have conducted **at least 96 searches in the homes of Jehovah's Witnesses** — 17 in Crimea being the highest number. **The total number of raids since the ban in 2017 reached 2157.****

During 2024, **41 persons were made defendants in new criminal cases**, of which **19 went through various types of detention, 15 of them are still behind bars.** Last year, criminal cases were initiated against **100 believers.**

**Sentences were handed down to 116 believers. 43 of them (37%) were sentenced to imprisonment** (It is noteworthy **that this year nine people were sent to forced labor as a punishment**). Terms of more than five years were given to 24 people (or almost 56% of those sentenced to imprisonment).

**Since 2017, 842 people have already been prosecuted**; 450 of them have spent at least 1 day in custody. **Currently, 147 prisoners of conscience are behind bars, either already convicted or awaiting sentencing. Of the 27 prisoners released from colonies, 8 were released this year.** Although they have served their main sentence, most continue to experience numerous difficulties due to additional restrictions imposed by the court, which can last up to eight years or sometimes even more.

"The cumulative numbers and severity of custodial sentences are increasing. To put it simply, during this year they imprisoned less, but more severely," Yaroslav Sivulskiy, a representative of the European Association of Jehovah's Witnesses, commented on the statistics.

**In 2024, the court handed down record-breaking sentences against three Jehovah's Witnesses. Khabarovsk residents Nikolay Polevodov, Vitaliy Zhuk and Stanislav Kim received eight years and six months, eight years and four months, eight years and two months in a penal colony, respectively.**

After about three months the court of appeal changed the punishment from imprisonment to a suspended sentence for shorter terms. Therefore, **the longest term in 2024 was given to Alexander Chagan from Tolyatti — eight years in a penal colony.** All in all, six believers have received such a harsh sentence since 2017.

Over the seven years of mass persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses, the number of people sentenced has reached 543, and 186 believers have been imprisoned. Almost 61% of them (113 people) received terms of more than five years.

**In 13 regions of Russia, the average term of imprisonment is 6 years or more.** This is especially true with the southern territories — the Astrakhan, Rostov, Volgograd Regions, Crimea, and Sevastopol.

For comparison: according to the official statistics of the Judicial Department at the Supreme Court of Russia for 2023, of the 1297 people convicted for intentional infliction of grievous bodily harm, only 0.85% (11 people) were sentenced to terms of five to eight years. Most were sentenced to terms of two to three years.

It seems that from the point of view of the Russian judicial system, Jehovah's Witnesses are more dangerous than those who beat people to the point of disability.

This is confirmed by a recent report of the US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) titled "[Religious Freedom Challenges for Jehovah's Witnesses](#)":

*Sentences for Jehovah's Witnesses continue to increase in severity. In June 2024, a court in Khabarovsk sentenced Nikolai Polevodov to eight years and six months, Vitaliy Zhuk to eight years and four months, and Stanislav Kim to eight years and two months in prison, surpassing the record length of eight years' imprisonment for a Jehovah's Witness.*

*Other punishments for Jehovah's Witnesses include fines and compulsory labor. In March 2024, a Teykovo court fined four Jehovah's Witnesses a collective 3,450,000 rubles (\$37,048) for their religious activities. And in January 2024, a court in Tolyatti sentenced Sona Oloпова to two years of forced labor for having a religious gathering."*

At the same time, hundreds of trials against Jehovah's Witnesses accused of extremism have not confirmed a single fact of extremist activity on the part of the believers.

### **International Support**

In the summer 2024, the **European Court of Human Rights** [ruled in favor of](#) 16 Jehovah's Witnesses who were subjected to illegal searches, arrests, and convictions for their religion in Russia. Although Russia withdrew from the European Convention on [Human Rights](#) back in 2022, the Russian Federation is still obliged to pay compensation assigned to believers.

On October 24, 2023, the **UN Human Rights Committee** issued two opinions in favor of Jehovah's Witnesses regarding the rulings to liquidate the local religious organizations (LROs) in Abinsk and Elista. In Russia, these rulings became precedent for the beginning of religious persecution, and a former member of the Abinsk LRO, the elderly Aleksandr Ivshin, is serving time for his faith in a penal colony.

The UN Human Rights Committee emphasizes that there are no calls for violence or other information inciting hatred in the literature of Jehovah's Witnesses. In both cases, Russia violated the right of Jehovah's Witnesses to "freedom of thought, conscience and [religion](#)" and "the right to freedom of assembly" (Articles 18.1 and 22.1 of the European Convention on Human Rights).

The Committee ordered Russia to reconsider the decisions on the ban and ordered it to "take all necessary steps to avoid similar violations in the future." During 2024, hearings were held in Russia on this issue, but the Committee's orders were never carried out. Moreover, after the publication of the Opinion of the Human Rights Committee on the liquidation of a religious organization in Abinsk, local security forces initiated a criminal case against [Valeriy Baylo](#), 66 at that time, — for participating in the activity of the Abinsk LRO. The court sentenced the believer to two and a half years in a penal colony. Now he is in custody and is awaiting the decision of the court of appeal.

Noteworthy is that very few media outlets in [Europe](#) echo such religious repression and that groups hostile to Jehovah's Witnesses pretending to defend human rights turn a blind eye to that persecution by Putin's regime.