

Table of Contents

- *ECHR defends religious freedom*
- *Orthodox can get Catholic and Lutheran churches – but Catholics and Lutherans can't*
- *Arson attacks on places of worship in Russia*
- *City administration considered liquidation of religious community "necessary"*
- *First post-soviet criminal trial of Jehovah's Witness "ludicrous"*
- *Religious property law takes effect*
- *A Scandal at Lambeth*
- *Jehovah's Witnesses' building damaged by fire*
- *Duma acts on law on church property*
- *Trial of Jehovah's Witness resumes*
- *Many church buildings not worth restoring to religious organizations*
- *Twelve ongoing criminal cases against Jehovah's Witnesses*
- *Christian churches torched in Muslim region*
- *Orthodox church criticizes European Court ruling*
- *City government to provide land for 200 new Orthodox churches in Moscow*
- *Building mosque in Moscow on hold*
- *Followers of Krishna may build house of worship*
- *Vandalism against religious buildings*
- *Russia sees sharp increase in human rights violations*
- *Criminal charge against Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia continues*
- *Exhibitors fail to overturn fines for art insulting church*
- *Will Russia extradite reader of Muslim theologian to Uzbekistan?*
- *Protests against mosques in Moscow to continue*
- *Police conduct raid in Moscow Muslim prayer house*
- *Jehovah's Witness leader faces 2 years in prison for "extremist" literature*
- *Russians protest building of mosque*
- *Woes of Jehovah's Witnesses prolonged by Russian officials*
- *Mormons may teach English*

- *Residents of Moscow Tekstilshchiki Region, supported by ultra-right organizations, collect signatures against mosque construction*
- *Surgut "extremist" case*
- *Jehovah's Witnesses rebuffed by high court*
- *Public access to religious website blocked in eastern Russia*
- *Witch-hunt against 265 religious and faith-based organizations*
- *Congresses disrupted, website blocked*
- *Jehovah's Witnesses appeal to Supreme Court*
- *Scientology materials declared extremist*
- *Mormons prevented from teaching English*
- *First criminal charges against Jehovah's Witnesses, Nursi reader sentenced*
- *Police block entrance to religious convention site*
- *Pentecostals of Khakasiia complain about persecution*
- *"A plan of organisational and operational search measures"*
- *Pastor in Russian Republic of Dagestan killed*
- *Law on extremism misused again against Jehovah's Witnesses in Mari El*
- *Attempt to impose Orthodox values on employees draws reaction*
- *Court deprives Pentecostal mother of parental rights*
- *Baptist punished for conducting Sunday school*
- *Appeal filed with ECHR regarding allegations of extremism*
- *Jehovah's Witness war veteran prosecuted for extremism*
- *Baptist and Jehovah's Witness worship services raided*
- *Jehovah's Witness fined for literature distribution*
- *Harassment of Jehovah's Witnesses*
- *Siberian Pentecostals face soviet-like restriction*
- *Will Jehovah's Witness and Armenian-rite Catholic court victories be respected?*
- *Orthodox clergy get bureaucrats to restrict Pentecostals*
- *Institute of Freedom of Conscience warns of prejudice in teacher training*
- *Jehovah's Witnesses of Moscow v. Russia*
- *Ghostlike existence for Dagestan's protestants*

- *Dagestan's religious freedom policy changing?*
- *Dagestan's controls on Islamic literature*
- *Dagestan's Sufi monopoly*
- *Muslim community leader kidnapped by Dagestan authorities?*
- *Does Dagestan need its anti-Wahhabi law?*
- *Jehovah's Witnesses forbidden to hand out magazines*
- *Mormons win court case against officials trying to limit evangelism*
- *Outcry at Russian government's media crackdown bid*
- *Russia bans texts by Scientology founder*
- *Jehovah's Witnesses driven out of meeting place*
- *Court rules in Jehovah's Witness' favor*
- *Roundtable on "sects" in Russia*
- *Lawful or unlawful?*
- *Unprecedented wave of persecution against Jehovah's Witnesses*
- *Security police break up Jehovah's Witnesses worship: FSB agents disrupt JW religious service in Altai*
- *Police break up Jehovah's Witnesses' worship in Sverdlovsk*
- *"E" Center in Cherepovets inspects Jehovah's Witnesses*
- *Searches in homes of Jehovah's Witnesses in Riazan province*
- *Jehovah's Witnesses arrested in Dagestan*
- *Islamic militant admits Moscow massacre and warns of more*
- *Fire in Jehovah's Witnesses' building*
- *Police confiscate religious literature from homes of believers*
- *Raids, literature confiscations and criminal case in Tambov*
- *Criminal charges against readers of religious literature*
- *Jehovah's Witnesses address their fellow citizens*
- *Three more readers of Muslim theologian detained*
- *Orthodox church to receive government money for faith-based services*
- *Not all religious organizations will be able to claim state aid*
- *Russian state Duma begins work on draft law for state financial support of selected religious organizations*
- *New bill drafted to put curbs on missionary activities with minors in Russia*

- ***Russian Orthodox Church to increase role in army***
 - ***Muslims raided, more Jehovah's Witness literature banned***
 - ***Another court ruling signals deteriorating freedoms***
 - ***Rights group: Russian religious freedom in danger***
 - ***The Russian government confirms condemnation of Jehovah's Witnesses***
 - ***Supreme Court ban on Jehovah's Witnesses begins to bite***
 - ***Samara prosecutor rejects accusation against Jehovah's Witnesses***
 - ***Orsk city court closes case against chairman of local Jehovah's Witnesses organization***
 - ***New Year's night arson of Jehovah's Witnesses house of worship***
 - ***Will more religious literature be banned in Russia?***
 - ***Justice ministry replies to Baptists' concerns regarding evangelism***
 - ***Jehovah's Witnesses get no satisfaction from Russian president***
 - ***Jehovah's Witnesses appeal to Russian president***
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ECHR defends religious freedom

Court confirms that Moscow ban on Jehovah's Witnesses was illegal

JW Official Website (15.12.2010) / HRWF (16.12.2010) - <http://www.hrwf.net> - The European Court of Human Rights ruled to protect religious freedom in Russia when it rendered its June 10, 2010, judgment in Jehovah's Witnesses of Moscow v. Russia. Russia referred the case to the Grand Chamber of the European Court on September 9, 2010, but on December 13, 2010, the panel of the Grand Chamber announced its rejection of Russia's bid to have the case reviewed. The original ECHR ruling to protect free worship is now final.

It was the final ruling in a case that has been examined by various courts for about 15 years. During the 1990s, four criminal cases were opened against Jehovah's Witnesses. Each time, however, the cases were terminated because Jehovah's Witnesses were found not guilty of breaking the law. In an attempt to liquidate the Moscow Community of Jehovah's Witnesses, a civil suit was then filed with the Golovinsky District Court. In 2001, that suit was dismissed. However, when the case was appealed, the appeal court ordered a retrial, and three years later the Golovinsky District Court handed down the decision to ban the activity of the religious Community in Moscow. Jehovah's Witnesses appealed that decision to the European Court. In its June 10 decision, the European Court unanimously declared that the rights of the community of 10,000 believers in Moscow had been grossly violated, and it ruled that individual and general measures be adopted "to redress so far as possible the effects" of the ban.

Vasily Kalin, the Chairman of the Administrative Center of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia, states: "The expression 'general . . . measures' indicates that the Court expects that Russia will do more than just pay the damages and restore the legal status of the Community." Kalin added: "The Russian Minister of Justice recently underscored Russia's obligation to implement the effective judgments of the European Court. We hope that now our fellow believers in Moscow and throughout Russia will be able to practice their faith peacefully."

Orthodox can get Catholic and Lutheran churches – but Catholics and Lutherans can't

By Felix Corley

Forum 18 (14.12.2010) / HRWF (15.12.2010) – www.hrwf.net - A Catholic church in Kaliningrad, the capital of Russia's Baltic exclave of Kaliningrad, which the local parish has been trying to get back in vain since the early 1990s, was among a number of religious properties suddenly handed to the Russian Orthodox Church in October. Other properties handed over, which likewise never belonged to the Orthodox, include former Lutheran churches and castles originally built by the Teutonic knights. Handing such property to the Orthodox is "fully justified", Inna Moreva, spokesperson for the Kaliningrad Government told Forum 18 News Service on 14 December.

Asked why it was right that property confiscated during the Soviet period from Catholic and Lutherans was handed to another religious community, she responded: "You're not Russian, you won't understand."

Similarly defending the transfers is Tatyana Sharova, deputy head of the Kaliningrad Government's Property Agency. "This property belonged to Kaliningrad Government. The transfer was decided by Kaliningrad Duma (parliament). All was done in accordance with the law," she insisted to Forum 18 on 14 December.

Sharova denied that any of the property had been confiscated by the Soviet authorities from the Lutherans or Catholics, but refused to say how it had otherwise ended up in state hands. She said her agency had never received any requests from the Lutheran or Catholic communities for the churches' return. Asked whether it had seen a 19 May 2010 letter from Catholic Archbishop Paolo Pezzi to then Kaliningrad Governor Georgy Boos requesting the return of the Holy Family Catholic Church, she responded: "The letter didn't reach our agency."

Roman Lunkin, head of the Moscow-based Institute of Religion and Law, which is affiliated with the Slavic Centre for Law and Justice, believes the decision was wrong. "It is a legal act – the authorities had the power to do this," he told Forum 18 on 14 December. "But from the point of view of the rights of believers and the equality of religious communities before the law, this is a violation."

Lunkin specifically points to Article 28 of Russia's 1993 Constitution, which guarantees freedom of religion, and Article 14, which affirms that Russia is a secular state and that "Religious associations are separate from the state and equal before the law".

The Kaliningrad Region makes up much of what was Germany's East Prussia until the region was captured by the Soviet Union during the Second World War and annexed. Almost the

entire ethnic German population was driven out and the area was resettled with people who moved from other parts of the Soviet Union.

The Russian Orthodox Church argues that any transfers of confiscated religious property should be on the basis not of who built the places of worship, but the composition of the population today.

Controversial laws

The controversial decision came in two Laws, adopted by the Kaliningrad Duma on 28 October. One Law handed the former Lutheran church in Arnau (Rodniki) to the Kaliningrad Orthodox Diocese, and the other Law handed over 14 further properties, including Kaliningrad's Holy Family Catholic Church and the former parish house next door, Queen Luise Memorial Church and a Lutheran chapel in Kaliningrad, as well as various castles. The Laws were signed by Kaliningrad's governor, Nikolai Tsukanov.

On 23 November, the acting head of the State Property Agency Irina Sidorenkova and Orthodox Bishop Serafim (Melkonyan) of Baltiisk signed the transfer documents at the regional Duma. The Russian Orthodox then signed agreements with the institutions now housed in each of them that they could continue to use these now Orthodox-owned properties. Holy Family Church currently houses the regional orchestra, while Queen Luise Memorial Church the puppet theatre.

The properties given to the Orthodox diocese on 28 October were the fifth batch of such properties in Kaliningrad given to it by various Kaliningrad and Federal government agencies in 2010, the website Kaliningrad-kultura.net notes. The website opposes these transfers, which include not only former Lutheran and Catholic property, but Reformed churches also. Forum 18 was unable to reach Governor Tsukanov and Sidorenkova of the State Property Agency on 14 December. An assistant to Tatyana Kuzaeva, the Kaliningrad Government representative to the Duma, told Forum 18 her boss could not speak without the authorisation of Governor Tsukanov.

The decision on the Catholic and Lutheran property proved controversial. One aide to a senior Kaliningrad Government official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, told Forum 18 on 14 December that they considered the decision unfair. "It was a surprise for us officials as well."

As well as unhappiness among Lutherans and Catholics, these decisions also aroused protests from local secularists, who argued that the Russian Orthodox had no right to these properties and that they should remain in state hands for continuing use by the cultural organisations they house. They complained that the Laws had been drawn up in secret without consulting those involved and society more widely. Several demonstrations against the decision have been held in Kaliningrad.

Years of rejected demands

Condemning the new Law handing the Holy Family Church to the Orthodox was Archbishop Pezzi. In a 4 November statement, posted on the diocesan website, he complained of the secrecy surrounding the Law's adoption and the "irresponsibility" of the "mistaken decision" that "can only lead to regret". He said the decision not to return the church to the Catholic parish "causes me to raise my voice in defence of the legal interests and dignity of my Kaliningrad flock".

The Catholic Holy Family parish has been asking for the church's return ever since the early 1990s, parish priest and dean of Kaliningrad Fr Aleksandr Krevsky told Forum 18 on 14 December. He said the parish has occasionally been able to use the church in the past two decades, pointing particularly to a special Mass in the Jubilee Year of 2000. "The church was more than full," he recalled.

Asked why the church's return is important, Fr Krevsky noted that "we consider the Holy Family Church as a historic church, built by Catholics a century ago". He said the parish meets in a temporary chapel which is not suitable for long-term use.

Fr Krevsky said that earlier "there were hopes" for the church's return. However, he conceded that the October Law "wasn't a surprise for us". Asked whether any hopes now remain, he responded: "All lies in the hands of the Lord."

Archbishop Pezzi of Moscow, in whose diocese Kaliningrad falls, has written several times to the Kaliningrad authorities requesting the return of the Holy Family Church. In his May letter to Governor Boos, seen by Forum 18, the Archbishop described the return of the church as being of "special interest" as the parish of the same name is meeting only in a temporary chapel.

As with other Catholic requests, this one too was rejected, by Kaliningrad's Culture Minister.

Jochen Loeber, dean of the Lutheran Church in Kaliningrad, told Forum 18 on 14 December that his Church is preparing an open letter and will give its views on the Laws shortly.

Federal Law should help return confiscated property

Meanwhile, both houses of the Federal Parliament in Moscow approved a Federal Law on the return of confiscated religious property held by the state or local authorities in November. President Dmitry Medvedev signed the Law on 30 November, the presidential website noted. Welcoming the Law is Lunkin of the Institute of Religion and Law. "This Law gives a more clear-cut procedure for regaining confiscated property," he told Forum 18. "It will be positive." He welcomed what he believes will be a far more open procedure. "All documents in each case must be published." He said this might prevent "secret transfers" of property to other religious communities, as has happened in Kaliningrad.

Lunkin noted a mixed picture over restitution since the early 1990s. He said the Russian Orthodox Church received the most property back, though by no means all, with other communities – like Baptists, Catholics, Lutherans and Jews – receiving lesser amounts. He also said the level of return varies greatly from region to region.

The issue of the return of historical property which began in the 1990s has been one of the most troublesome issues for religious communities.

However, Lunkin warned that the new Law will not help in cases where property of one religious community has already been handed to another, such as the former Catholic church in Blagoveshchensk, which was given to the Orthodox Church.

Many religious communities also broadly welcomed the Law, though many are waiting to see how it will be enacted in practice. They hope it will allow long-stalled attempts to regain confiscated places of worship and other significant property.

In his May letter to Kaliningrad's Governor, Archbishop Pezzi noted that regaining churches the Catholics built and used in Russia before 1917 remains "highly complex". He said there are still over 100 church properties across Russia that have not been returned.

Arson attacks on places of worship in Russia

JW Official Website (09.12.2010) / HRWF (10.12.2010) – www.hrwf.net - The harassment of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia continued in November 2010 with several acts of vandalism against their houses of worship. In the Irkutsk Region and Krasnodar Territory, arson attacks were carried out on two Kingdom Halls, where Jehovah's Witnesses meet for religious services. Vandals also caused damage to the religious building in the city of Lipetsk. The total damages amount to over 160,000 rubles (\$5,000 US).

Igor Oshkin, one of Jehovah's Witnesses was on security detail at the Kingdom Hall in the village of Chunsky, Irkutsk Region, the night of November 15, 2010. He said that the fire alarm went off shortly after the porch and roof caught fire. Thanks to the efforts of local firefighters, the fire was extinguished. An expert examination of the site confirmed that it was an arson attack. According to a preliminary estimation, the damages caused by the fire amount to approximately 90,000 rubles (approximately \$3,000 US). Prior to the incident, the Witnesses received threats. Igor Oshkin says: "We are neither scared nor panicking, but we feel as if we are 'under siege'. So we have buckets of water ready to act in case of any future attempts.

On the night of November 25, 2010, an explosion occurred in the Kingdom Hall in the city of Labinsk, Krasnodar Territory. It blew apart the inside door and shattered several windowpanes. One of Jehovah's Witnesses, Sergey Vinokurov, and the husband of one of the congregation members managed to extinguish the fire. The police officers arrived later and found evidence of attempted arson—the remains of four bottles containing a flammable liquid. Damages are estimated at over 69,000 rubles (\$2,300 US). Sergey Vinokurov expressed the feelings of the congregation members this way: "We did not hurt anybody, nor did we cause any damage to the property of other people. It is very sad that some individuals express their hostility this way.

And in the city of Lipetsk, unidentified persons damaged the entrance and destroyed a mailbox of the local Kingdom Hall.

City administration considered liquidation of religious community "necessary"

By Felix Corley,

Forum 18 (01.12.2010) – HRWF (06.12.2010) www.hrwf.net - Testimony by a city official at the ongoing criminal trial of Jehovah's Witness Aleksandr Kalistratov in southern Siberia has revealed the way different officials and agencies in Altai Republic worked together over some years to try to find ways to halt the activity of local Jehovah's Witnesses, before finding an effective mechanism in Russia's 2002 Extremism Law. Moves involved the city administration - including Mayor Viktor Oblogin - the Prosecutor's Office, Altai Republic Supreme Court and a university lecturer who provided an expert analysis of Jehovah's

Witness literature. The official insisted that a request to liquidate the Jehovah's Witness community in Gorno-Altai, the republic's capital, came because the city administration "considered it necessary". However, Forum 18's investigations could not determine conclusively who initiated these attempts.

Amid a continuing Russia-wide state campaign against the Jehovah's Witnesses, Kalistratov – who has led the Gorno-Altai community since December 1998 – has become the first of their members to face criminal trial for sharing beliefs in post-Soviet Russia. Launched under Article 282, Part 1 of the Criminal Code ("Incitement of hatred [nenavist] or enmity [vrazhda], as well as the humiliation of human dignity"), his trial began at Gorno-Altai City Court on 20 October, with repeated hearings since then.

Local Jehovah's Witnesses fear that if Kalistratov is convicted, the liquidation of their religious organisation – which officials have long been seeking – will be easier.

Irina Moshkareva was a city administration official responsible for links with public – including religious – organisations between October 2003 and May 2009, when she went on maternity leave. In often rather unspecific testimony to the court on the afternoon of 15 November – of which Forum 18 has seen a transcript of a recording made by Jehovah's Witnesses and listened to the key extract – she reveals that she was intensively involved in work against local Jehovah's Witnesses between 2006 and May 2009.

Moshkareva told the court that 37 local people had signed a letter in a January 2007 issue of a local newspaper against the building of a Jehovah's Witness Kingdom Hall.

Among other complaints about individual Jehovah's Witnesses, she said a set of grandparents had complained in writing in 2006 and 2007 about the way their daughter and son-in-law were bringing up their grandchildren as Jehovah's Witnesses. (In his own testimony to the court on 16 November 2010, the grandfather protested indignantly that his grandchildren "don't eat blood sausage".) In January 2008 the city administration sent materials on this case to the Prosecutor's Office, but Moshkareva told the court she was not aware of the results of any investigation it might have completed.

However, Moshkareva admitted there had been no written complaints against the local Jehovah's Witness organisation, despite her urging. Nor had administrative or criminal prosecutions against community members occurred.

Liquidation appeal, despite lack of official warnings

Despite this – and without there being any official warnings to the Jehovah's Witness community – Moshkareva said she had prepared a 9 January 2008 appeal from Mayor Oblogin to Altai Republic Supreme Court calling for the activity of the local Jehovah's Witness community to be halted and its organisation to be liquidated.

"We were governed by Article 26, Part 3, Point 1 of the Civil Procedural Code and Article 14 of the Federal [1997 Religion] Law, on banning and liquidating in response to incidents of violation of public order, actions directed at carrying out extremist activity, causing harm to the morality and health of citizens, infringement of the person, rights and freedoms of citizens, discouraging citizens from carrying out civil obligations enshrined in law, violation of the norms of the [1993] Constitution, and inciting hatred or enmity, as well as the humiliation of human dignity, as punishable under Article 282 of the 1996 Criminal Code," she told the court.

Altai Republic Supreme Court rejected Mayor Oblogin's application against the Jehovah's Witnesses on 18 January 2008, Marina Aleksina, deputy chair of the Court, told Forum 18 from Gorno-Altaiisk on 1 December 2010. She said the appeal was returned to the mayor on 25 January 2008 and refused to give Forum 18 a copy of it.

Moshkareva also told Gorno-Altaiisk City Court that in the wake of this failed approach to the Supreme Court, the city administration sent its appeal to the Prosecutor's Office. While maintaining there was "no particular difference", she stressed that the request had been to halt the activity of the Jehovah's Witnesses, not to liquidate (although the Supreme Court confirmed to Forum 18 that the appeal had included liquidation).

Liquidation is "necessary"

Asked by Kalistratov's defence why the move to halt the community's activity had been initiated, Moshkareva responded: "Because our leadership considered it necessary." She further explained: "On the basis of these written and oral appeals and on the basis of some knowledge which we already had of the activity of the given organisation and reports we received." Asked whom she had in mind by the city administration's "leadership", she replied: "With us, all appeals are signed by the mayor of the city."

Asked by one defence lawyer whether she had warned Kalistratov that the city administration was seeking the liquidation of his Jehovah's Witness organisation, Moshkareva responded: "In principle, we certainly aren't obliged to warn [of this]." Nor, she said, was any attempt made to discuss complaints with Kalistratov or seek his response.

Views on Jehovah's Witnesses "were naturally mostly negative"

Moshkareva also revealed that between 2006 and May 2009 she had worked closely with Vladimir Bedarev, the assistant to Gorno-Altaiisk Prosecutor Viktor Ponosov. She passed him large quantities of Jehovah's Witness literature that she had acquired by various channels - including directly from the community - and copies that local people had handed in to the city administration. She admitted that she had done so at the verbal request of Bedarev and a female Prosecutor's Office official whom she did not name.

Moshkareva also spoke of her co-operation with Yuliya Khvastunova, a lecturer at Gorno-Altaiisk State University who had written on the local religious situation. The lecturer had handed her Jehovah's Witness literature in late 2007 and early 2008 and verbally "given her views" about it, which "were naturally mostly negative". She said Khvastunova had offered to co-operate "if such questions arise". She indicated that Khvastunova had believed that Jehovah's Witness activity should be halted or restricted.

Among Khvastunova's academic interests, noted on her page on the State University website, are "non-traditional teachings and cults", on which she has completed a textbook. Also listed among her work is a 2006 talk: "Mutual relations of the church and the state on the policy of countering destructive sects in the Russian Federation".

Although Moshkareva told the court she had not asked Khvastunova to produce a written assessment of Jehovah's Witness literature and that no such official assessment was produced for the city administration, Khvastunova did produce such an expert analysis with colleague Margarita Dolgovykh for the Prosecutor's Office on 18 December 2008.

The analysis, together with a further analysis produced by three experts at Kemerovo State University on 4 May 2009 - both seen by Forum 18 - were used in the case against Kalistratov. (The nearly 25,000-word December 2008 analysis states that it was completed within four days.) They were also used in the case that banned 18 Jehovah's Witness publications as "extremist" on 1 October 2009 - like Kalistratov's, heard by Gorno-Altai City Court. Altai Republic Supreme Court upheld this ban on 27 January 2010.

Forum 18 notes that by later in 2009, Altai Republic Supreme Court was taking less of a risk in banning the Jehovah's Witness literature than it would have been in taking up Mayor Oblogin's January 2008 request to move against their Gorno-Altai community, as Russia's Supreme Court had already upheld a similar ban on literature determined extremist by Rostov-on-Don Regional Court.

Not involved?

Khvastunova, the lecturer, denied having any "special role" in Kalistratov's case and insisted she had not been present at any court session. Speaking to Forum 18 from Gorno-Altai on 30 November, she said she has never conducted any official expert analysis of Jehovah's Witness literature. On hearing that Forum 18 has seen her December 2008 analysis, however, she conceded that she had conducted an analysis of "a small number" of their publications in 2008 at the request of the city prosecutor: "He asked the university, and I and a colleague were chosen." She angrily refused to say if she had been paid for the lengthy analysis.

Khvastunova told Forum 18 she had chaired Altai Republic Justice Department's Expert Commission for Conducting Religious Expert Analyses only since spring 2010. "There's been only one meeting of it, and all it did was discuss how the Commission should be structured. It didn't discuss the Jehovah's Witnesses."

Khvastunova also told Forum 18 she "couldn't recall" having told Moshkareva that she wanted to see Jehovah's Witness activity halted or restricted, describing that as "rubbish". She said reading reports of her alleged remarks in the press had made her angry.

She denied to Forum 18 that she was a fan of the work of widely known Russian "anti-cult" activist Aleksandr Dvorkin. She claimed rather to advocate a "secular" approach.

No answers from city administration or Prosecutor's Office

No official was prepared to give Forum 18 a telephone number for Moshkareva. Vladimir Ilinykh, chief of Gorno-Altai's administration, told Forum 18 on 29 November that although she remains the administration's employee while on leave, he was unable to pass on contact details. Asked whether it is right that city officials gather material on a religious community and pass it on to the Prosecutor's Office, he responded: "That's a very difficult question." He did not answer it.

Mayor Oblogin's secretary told Forum 18 on 29 November that he was on a work trip. On both 30 November and 1 December she said he was on leave. One of Oblogin's deputies, Ezher Tatin, told Forum 18 on 30 November that he covers only economic issues and referred Forum 18 to another deputy, Yury Nechaev, who covers social issues. However, after Forum 18 explained that it was seeking more information about moves over some years by the mayor and other city administration officials to halt Jehovah's Witness activity in the town, Nechaev said "I am not informed on this" and put the phone down.

Cheine Yezeneva, Moshkareva's successor and press spokesperson for the city administration, insisted to Forum 18 on 29 November that in more than a year since she has held the post, she has not been aware of any moves by the administration against Jehovah's Witnesses.

Forum 18 sent a written request to the city administration on 29 November for a copy of Mayor Oblogin's January 2008 appeal to Altai Republic Supreme Court to liquidate the Jehovah's Witness community, but despite follow-up calls had no response by the end of the working day in Gorno-Altai on 1 December.

Larisa Shestak, spokesperson for Altai Republic Prosecutor's Office, told Forum 18 on 30 November that Bedarev – the Gorno-Altai Prosecutor's Office official supposed to have worked closely with Moshkareva - died in autumn 2010. Shestak said he had worked directly for City Prosecutor Ponosov, who has now retired. However, she added that Prosecutor's Office officials cannot comment on the situation while the case against Kalistratov continues.

Forum 18 was thus unable to ask her whether the initiative to bring cases against the Jehovah's Witness community and its leader had come from Mayor Oblogin, city administration official Moshkareva, university lecturer Khvastunova or Orthodox clergy such as Fr Georgy Balakin, head of Barnaul diocese's Gorno-Altai deanery, who told Forum 18 on 30 November that the City Prosecutor had invited him to be a prosecution witness at Kalistratov's trial.

First post-soviet criminal trial of Jehovah's Witness "ludicrous"

By Geraldine Fagan,

Forum 18 (30.11.2010) – HRWF (07.12.2010) www.hrwf.net - As the first post-Soviet criminal trial in Russia of a Jehovah's Witness for sharing beliefs with others continues in Gorno-Altai (Altai Republic), lawyers and other observers are disturbed that there should be a trial for this 'offence'. This and similar actions against readers of the works of Muslim theologian Said Nursi are causing increasing alarm, Forum 18 News Service notes.

Addressing an 11 November Moscow press conference on the misapplication of the 2002 Extremism Law, Arli Chimirov, one of the lawyers defending Aleksandr Kalistratov in Gorno-Altai, described how he had been glad the situation in Russia was different when defending Jehovah's Witnesses in Uzbekistan six or seven years ago. "But now I have grave doubts."

Kalistratov, who has led Gorno-Altai Jehovah's Witness congregation since 1998, has been charged under Article 282, Part 1 of the Criminal Code (Entitled "Incitement of hatred [nenavist] or enmity [vrazhda], as well as the humiliation of human dignity"). This carries a maximum punishment of two years' imprisonment. His trial - currently in recess - will resume on 13 December, the court website notes. Chimirov told Forum 18 on 26 November that the trial may end as soon as 17 December.

Signed by Yevgeni Saidutov, an investigator with Altai Republic Public Prosecutor's Office, the charges maintain that 34-year-old Kalistratov ordered religious literature - including 13 titles banned as extremist by Gorno-Altai City Court and 30 by Rostov-on-Don Regional

Court - from the Jehovah's Witnesses Russian headquarters in St Petersburg, and organised its distribution by his community between October 2008 and the end of 2009.

Specifically, it claims Kalistratov visited Aleksei Kandarakov at his home in Gorno-Altai during the second half of December 2009 and gave him two copies of "What Does God Require of Us?" while knowing it had been banned by Gorno-Altai City Court on 1 October 2009.

Forum 18 notes that the Gorno-Altai ruling had not in fact entered force by the end of 2009.

Kalistratov earlier encountered local opposition on becoming a Jehovah's Witness in 1994. A school psychologist for two years, he was urged to leave his post after refusing to submit to pressure from his superiors that he become Orthodox, and is now a street sweeper. He was detained for three weeks in 2000 for rejecting compulsory military service, but was later exonerated and offered alternative civilian service.

Larisa Shestak, spokesperson for Altai Republic Prosecutor's Office, told Forum 18 that no Prosecutor's Office official could comment on how the case against Kalistratov had been prepared or about the trial while the case continued. "The Prosecutor's Office does not have the aim to imprison someone," she stated from Gorno-Altai on 30 November, "but to uphold the law of the Russian Federation."

Current trial

As the case began at Gorno-Altai City Court on 20 October, Judge Marina Sokolovskaya refused permission for video recordings - despite Kalistratov's plea that his trial is of public and political significance.

Reports of proceedings therefore come from notes made by Jehovah's Witnesses present at the trial and transcripts of audio recordings received by Forum 18.

While all the prosecution witnesses have now testified, none has provided concrete evidence that Kalistratov engaged in extremism as defined by the Law, Jehovah's Witness lawyer Chimirov told Forum 18 on 26 November. Most witnesses are themselves Jehovah's Witnesses, who typically testify that Kalistratov is respected and loved; an upright citizen who has never incited religious hatred. According to one, "if everyone were like Kalistratov, there would be no crime, and courts wouldn't be necessary."

Several witnesses called by Bulat Yaimov, Assistant Public Prosecutor of Altai Republic, testified that they did not know Kalistratov or anything about his activity during the period he is alleged to have engaged in extremism, from October 2008 to the end of 2009. "It's like 'Mimino'- they've been picked up off the street!" Jehovah's Witness lawyer Chimirov joked at the Moscow press conference. (In the 1970s Soviet comedy "Mimino", one of the protagonists attempts to recruit defence 'witnesses' in this way).

Star witness drinks tea with the accused

Even the prosecution's star witness, Aleksei Kandarakov, failed to confirm that he had received extremist literature from Kalistratov when testifying on 21 October, the second day of the trial. According to the charges against Kalistratov, he visited Kandarakov at home during the second half of December 2009 and gave him two copies of a Jehovah's Witness brochure published in 1996, "What Does God Require of Us?" But Kandarakov explained to

the court that, since Jehovah's Witness publications freely circulate in Gorno-Altai, he could not confirm that he had received the brochures from Kalistratov personally. Kandarakov also commented that, while he is Orthodox, he is on good terms with and drinks tea with Kalistratov, whom he described as "an honest guy".

Addressing the court on 20 October, Kalistratov similarly stated that, while Kandarakov considers himself Orthodox, "this doesn't prevent us from being on friendly terms. He's interested in the Bible, enjoys reading Jehovah's Witness and other literature. He asks many questions and makes interesting conclusions supporting his religion, while I give conclusions from the Bible. We drink tea and chat, and if I had incited hatred in or humiliated him we would hardly be able to do that."

Kalistratov also explained that the 1996 edition of "What Does God Require of Us?" has not been supplied to or used by Russian Jehovah's Witnesses for some years, as it was republished in 2003. As all his literature was confiscated during a police search of his home on 7 June 2009, continued Kalistratov, he could therefore not possibly have given Kandarakov the 1996 brochure in late December 2009 - and even then would have given only one copy, as he never provides duplicates.

On 21 October, Assistant Public Prosecutor Yaimov defended his lack of firm evidence by stating that Article 282 of the Criminal Code "is amorphous and so does not require concretisation".

"An orientation from above"

There are also other procedural issues in Kalistratov's case. On 20 October, Judge Sokolovskaya rejected lawyer Chimirov's complaint that the two copies of "What Does God Require of Us?" taken from Kandarakov's home had not been checked for Kalistratov's fingerprints. On 16 November, the fifth day of the trial, one witness admitted he had signed his statement without reading it after being assured by an investigator that nothing had been added to it.

On 22 October, the third day of the trial, a senior investigating official who confiscated the Jehovah's Witness literature later banned by Gorno-Altai City Court, Amyr Urchimayev, was unable to establish any connection between it and Kalistratov. Asked why he had seized literature before it was declared extremist, Urchimayev said he had received "an orientation from above" in March 2009. Other state witnesses shed further light on the origins of the moves against Jehovah's Witnesses in Altai Republic.

Officials have repeatedly refused to explain why and by whom the widespread state actions against Jehovah's Witnesses and readers of the works of Muslim theologian Said Nursi were initiated.

"I have serious complaints about the Jehovah's Witnesses"

Two Orthodox priests have also testified at Kalistratov's trial. But Fr Georgy Balakin, head of Barnaul diocese's Gorno-Altai deanery, admitted to the court on 22 October that he did not know Kalistratov or any other Jehovah's Witnesses personally, and of their faith only through the works of prominent anti-cultist Aleksandr Dvorkin. Fr Georgy spoke of the offence caused him by the Jehovah's Witnesses' description of his own faith as "false", but went on to describe their faith in the same terms within minutes. He declined to answer Jehovah's Witness lawyer Viktor Zhenkov's question: "You said it upsets you when Jehovah's

Witnesses say that Jesus Christ is not God, but the Son of God. But doesn't it upset you when atheists say God doesn't exist at all?"

The second priest, Fr Sergi Bashkatov, told the court on 15 November, the fourth day of the trial, that he was testifying at Fr Georgy's suggestion, and similarly knew of the Jehovah's Witness faith only through Dvorkin's works.

Fr Georgy told Forum 18 on 30 November that he had testified in court "as a representative of Gorno-Altai's Orthodox population" at the invitation of the city Prosecutor's Office. "I don't know the defendant, but I have serious complaints about the Jehovah's Witnesses," he told Forum 18. "They say insulting things about the Orthodox clergy, for example." He said that he had "several times" been invited to the Prosecutor's Office some months ago to give testimony for the case against Kalistratov.

Ombudsperson official "failed to find a single convincing conclusion"

Testifying in Kalistratov's defence on 17 November, the sixth day, was Mikhail Odintsov, responsible for freedom of conscience issues at the Office of Russia's Ombudsperson for Human Rights, Vladimir Lukin. Odintsov described Kalistratov's trial as "without precedent", and commented that although he had read the charges and attentively listened to the evidence presented by the Public Prosecutor, he had "failed to find a single convincing conclusion".

He also characterised as "unscientific" the expert analysis which determined the texts Kalistratov is alleged to have distributed extremist.

Reliance upon this expert analysis, Odintsov concluded, "is fraught with further miscarriages of justice and may prove a detonator of mass violations of human rights in Russia."

In a 20 September letter seen by Forum 18, Kalistratov wrote to Lukin asking him to send a representative of his Office to the trial.

The charge sheet gives a typical example of the supposedly extremist content of the literature Kalistratov is alleged to have distributed. This example includes the following passage from an April 1998 issue of 'Awake!' magazine: "We attended a church in Seattle (Washington State, USA), but this was purely a formality. Religion did not occupy an important place in our lives until Jamie, a cheerful young pioneer (a full-fledged preacher of the good news) knocked at our door. She was so nice that I agreed to study the Bible. Since Fred also showed an interest, Jamie's parents led the study and a year later, in 1968, Fred and I were baptized. From the very beginning we had a sincere desire to place the interests of God's Kingdom first in our lives."

Viktor Polyakov, who represents the "For Human Rights" human rights organisation in the Siberian city of Novosibirsk, described the expert analysis as "ludicrous". He told the Portal-Credo Russian religious affairs website on 22 October that: "I hope there will not be written another page in the history of Russian justice copied from the 1970s and 80s. The persecution of people's right to believe in God as they wished and the fight against freedom and democracy at that time ended in the collapse of the USSR. The past hasn't taught our rulers anything. Existing on the money of taxpayers - and that means Jehovah's Witnesses - the punitive organs have again sensed they can rock the boat. It seems these organs don't care that everyone will start to drown."

Earlier Nursi extremism conviction upheld

Exactly the same extremism-related charges that Kalistratov is facing were used on 18 August to convict Ilham Islamli, the first reader of the works of the late Muslim theologian Said Nursi to have been convicted under the Criminal Code. Nizhny Novgorod District Court sentenced him to ten months detention, suspended for one year, the court website noted. Strangely, Islamli's written verdict - seen by Forum 18 - gives the sentence as eight months' detention, suspended for eight months.

On 22 October, Nizhny Novgorod Regional Court upheld Islamli's sentence, the court noted on its website. Nursi readers told Forum 18 that Islamli - who has now left Russia - did not lodge the appeal.

Other criminal cases

Prosecutors in other regions who have launched similar criminal extremism cases centring on distribution of banned Jehovah's Witness literature are awaiting the outcome of the Gorno-Altai trial before proceeding, Jehovah's Witness spokesperson Grigory Martynov suggested to Forum 18 on 11 November.

Such cases are currently pending in Asbest (Sverdlovsk Region), Chelyabinsk, Kemerovo, Omsk, Salekhard (Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Region), Tambov, Tula and Yoshkar-Ola (Mari El Republic). While most do not yet concern named individuals, three are against Igor Potapov (Kemerovo), Petr Babilyulka (Tula) and Maksim Kalinin (Mari El Republic).

Babilyulka - imprisoned as a conscientious objector from 1956-62 - is accused of distributing three copies of the banned Jehovah's Witness book "What Does the Bible Really Teach?" to an undetermined group of persons in a private flat in Tula on 30 June 2010, according to 21 July case materials seen by Forum 18.

While the Mari El case against Maksim Kalinin remains open, evidence obtained from body searches during the 10 August raid of his congregation's Kingdom Hall in Yoshkar-Ola was declared inadmissible on 27 September, according to the Jehovah's Witnesses.

European Court verdict challenge

On 10 June 2010 the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg ruled in favour of the Jehovah's Witnesses of Moscow in response to their October 2001 complaint against a ban on the community (Application No. 302/02

<<http://cmiskp.echr.coe.int/tpk197/viewhbkm.asp?action=open&table=F69A27FD8FB86142BF01C1166DEA398649&key=82978&sessionId=56541383&skin=hudoc-en&attachment=true>>)

On 9 September 2010, however, Russia asked for the case to be referred to the Grand Chamber of the European Court, and this request is now pending.

Religious property law takes effect

President Medvedev signs law on return of religious property

Interfax-Religiia (30.11.2010) / HRWF (02.12.2010) - <http://www.hrwf.net> - Russian President Dmitry Medvedev signed the law on return of property of religious significance to religious organizations.

The head of state reported this to Patriarch of Moscow and all-Rus Kirill at the church of the Nativity of the Theotokos in the Great Kremlin palace, which, according to law, should be transferred to the Russian Orthodox church.

"Here is a special place. I take the opportunity to inform you that today I signed the law on return of property of religious significance to religious organizations. This is a serious law on which there have been rather long discussions and agreements," D. Medvedev said, addressing the patriarch.

The president noted that the law was adopted in its best revision. He said that this document permits the resolution of a number of urgent problems facing the Russian Orthodox church and other religious organizations.

On his part the patriarch thanked the president and parliament for the adoption of the law. "The document shows that our country has overcome severe consequences and justice has been restored. The only state that can have a future is one which establishes its activity upon justice. . . . The law is the result of specific compromises, as it should be," Patriarch Kirill said.

Then the president and patriarch continued their conversation over tea without the press present. (tr. by PDS, posted 30 November 2010)

Patriarch Kirill upset over negative public noise regarding church initiatives

Patriarch of Moscow and all-Rus Kirill is satisfied with the church-state dialogue, but he is upset by the character of relations between the church and society.

"In the area of church-state relations in Russia there does not now remain a single matter of principle that would contain any conflict between the church and the state," the patriarch said at a meeting with employees of the synodal Department for Relations between Church and Society, which was held Tuesday in Moscow.

He said that there have been three such questions: the presence of religiously oriented subjects in the schools, participation of the clergy in the armed forces, and return to the church of property illegally seized from it.

The primate noted that "all these questions have been resolved." He recalled that it became known today that Russian President Dmitry Medvedev signed the law on transfer of property of religious significance to religious organizations.

The patriarch acknowledged that technical questions connected with implementation of all these agreements will remain on the agenda of church-state relations. Although, he continued, the most important thing is that "on the level of legislation there do not now exist, in principle, any questions which would affect the very essence of the church's mission or would distort or restrict the church's opportunities."

At the same time, Patriarch Kirill pointed out that all of these positive changes in relations between church and state have evoked "an unfriendly reaction from very many public circles."

"I do not have in view any of the expressions of individual participants in the 'living magazines,' the social networks. As one extremely experienced blogger said, 'inscriptions disappeared from the fences after "living magazines" began being used. You don't stuff a rag in every mouth; they say what they want,'" the patriarch said.

He said the issue is the "general background noise," which is nowadays being created regarding the return of "what was once confiscated illegally and bathed in the blood of our fathers and grandfathers, and regarding topics of education, and regarding—to a lesser extent, but which will be to the same extent when this program begins to be actively implemented—participation of clergy in the armed forces."

The patriarch called the personnel of the synodal Department for Relations between Church and Society to concentrate on neutralizing "these attacks against the church."

He said that individual publications may permit themselves "to say whatever they want about the church—lies, slander—and to consider themselves rather respectable." The church's task is to "tear off the mask from such people."

"To a great extent the success of the church's action in the sphere of public life depends on efforts by you, the face of the church. . . The issue is not simply the church's prestige or the church's place in public life, although this also is important. In the end the issue is what our society will be like," Patriarch Kirill emphasized. (tr. by PDS, posted 30 November 2010)

A Scandal at Lambeth

By Michael Bourdeaux (*)

The Times (20.11.2010) / HRWF (01.12.2010) - <http://www.hrwf.net> - The rot set in with Archbishop Michael Ramsey! That was the unequivocal message which Metropolitan Hilarion, chairman of the Department for External Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate, delivered at a dinner in his honour at Lambeth Palace on 9 September. On the watch of this saintly man, Bishop John Robinson published *Honest to God*, for which there was "no sanction" from on high and which, according to Ilarion, inaugurated the downward slide of the Anglican Church towards liberalism.

Actually the above needs modification. It is there in detail in the official Russian text, but this passage seems to have been expurgated by Metropolitan Hilarion, possibly in the last few minutes before he delivered it. There are, in fact, at least three versions of his speech in existence: what he planned to say (eight packed pages which would have taken at least 45 minutes to deliver); what he did say (a pre-dinner speech of twenty minutes) and a sanitised version subsequently posted on the website of the Moscow Patriarchate.

Whatever emerges from this confusion, one fact is ineradicable: Metropolitan Hilarion, while an honoured guest, caused grave offence by criticising his host, the Archbishop of Canterbury, and his church for alleged "liberalism". Apparently, the Metropolitan promised to excise a passage falsely criticising the Anglican Church for supporting abortion and euthanasia, but this crept in anyway.

Whether the Archbishop's desire to visit the Russian Orthodox Church formally has suffered a setback, only time will tell. One positive outcome, though, is that the Anglican authorities plan formally and regularly to inform the Metropolitan of key developments in the communion. It is perhaps surprising that this does not already happen. It will not be easy for Hilarion to atone for his offence, though some of his entourage were deeply apologetic for what had happened.

Hilarion is a post-Soviet man. Born Grigori Alfeyev in July 1966, originally studying music, he was ordained in Lithuania during the last days of communism. Following a lengthy stay in Oxford, achieving a doctorate, he was appointed assistant bishop in London in 2002, where he came into conflict with the aged and deeply respected Metropolitan Antony Bloom, leading to a rapid recall. But this did not prevent his meteoric rise: Brussels, Vienna, Bishop of Volokolamsk, Chairman of the Department of External Church Relations, Archbishop (2009), elevated to Metropolitan a year later. He has somehow found time also to develop his musical activity. His St Matthew Passion received a standing ovation at the Great Hall of the Moscow Conservatory in 2007. How could a man of such outstanding intellect cause such offence – more than once – in his capacity as a church diplomat?

With his breadth of education, Metropolitan Hilarion knows his own church history, yet he throws stones in a glasshouse, taking it on himself to attack the liberalism of the Anglican Communion while remaining silent on the past and present ills of his own church. In dialogue with Metropolitan Hilarion, one might ask why his church has continued to bless the Russian military, which inflicted genocidal attacks against the Muslim Chechens seeking independence from Moscow. Not one word of criticism has ever come from the Moscow Patriarchate. The London Russian parish, so well known to the Metropolitan, has used strong-arm tactics to acquire full rights over the various church properties, the cathedral and several dwelling houses, imposing a strong Moscow-backed regime over those following the spiritual teaching of the late Metropolitan Antony.

Perhaps most seriously, there are unresolved questions related to the undoubted collaboration of at least some clergy and members of the episcopate with the Soviet regime. Some individuals repented of their sins, but there has never been an all-embracing enquiry into what happened behind the scenes (or, indeed, sometimes on public platforms). The Moscow priest, Fr Gleb Yakunin, while an elected deputy to the Duma twenty years ago, had access for a short time to the KGB archives and made known the horrors he found. A former political prisoner, he was then suppressed by his own church and has never been reinstated.

Not much better is the case of Fr Pavel Adelheim, another former prisoner of conscience who lost a leg in an attempt on his life in a labour camp. In post-Soviet times he served in three parishes in the diocese of Pskov, but his authoritarian bishop, Yevsevi, could not abide independent initiatives such as starting new parishes and establishing a children's home. Known even in the UK as an outstanding pastor, Fr Pavel has been expelled from all this work and the Moscow Patriarchate has not rectified the injustice.

At the same time, there are some optimistic signs. Sergei Filatov, a respected lay commentator on church affairs in Moscow, has just stated in a lengthy article on the current policies of the Patriarchate: "New life is invading the Department of Charitable Works and Social Service [of the Moscow Patriarchate], under Bishop Pantileimon of Orekhovo-Zuyevsky." Such longstanding scandals as the treatment of Fr Kochetkov, rusticated for trying to introduce modern Russian into the Church Slavonic liturgy, have been resolved. The distinguished artist, Fr Zinon, also a victim of the Bishop of Pskov, has been reinstated to become virtually the Patriarchate's official iconographer. The spiritual heritage of the

outstanding theologian, Fr Alexander Men', murdered in 1990, is finally beginning to be valued in official circles.

Patriarch Kirill, elected in January 2009, is a stronger character than even Metropolitan Hilarion and also had a spell of British education learning English. He has it in his power to rectify the ills arising from Hilarion's ill-starred conduct and an invitation to Archbishop Rowan Williams to visit Moscow would be an excellent beginning.

(*) Michael Bourdeaux, founder of Keston College in England, worked to examine and explain the systematic destruction of religion in Iron Curtain nations during the Cold War and to defend the rights of faiths in these countries to worship as they chose. When the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc regimes collapsed, Bourdeaux's efforts for universal religious freedom were widely embraced. He received the Templeton Prize in 1984.

Jehovah's Witnesses' building damaged by fire

Arson of Jehovah's Witnesses' house of worship in village of Chunskii, Irkutsk Province

Russia Religion News/Stetson University (29.11.2010) / HRWF (01.12.2010) - <http://www.hrwf.net> - On 15 November, unknown persons set fire to the house of worship (Kingdom Hall) of the Jehovah's Witnesses in the village of Chunskii, Irkutsk province, the press service of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia told Portal-credo.ru.

As the watchman in the house of worship, believer Igor Sshkin, reported, at 2:55 the fire alarm sounded, the lights went out, and there was a smell of smoke. Since smoke detectors had not been installed on the porch, the watchman detected the smell of smoke only after the doors leading into the main hall caught fire.

After going outside, Igor Oshkin saw that the front porch and part of the roof were on fire. The firefighters who arrived at the scene extinguished the blaze. The hall where Jehovah's Witnesses' worship services are held was saved. The porch was completely burned up and a part of the roof. By preliminary estimates, the damage amounted to 90,000 rubles.

"I did not feel any panic or fear at the time; we have been expecting trouble. The only thing that concerned me was saving the main hall. Now we, so to speak, always have a bucket of water ready and we respond to every tiny murmur," Igor Oshkin said.

In the opinion of Igor Oshkin, this was a case of arson. Threats on the part of ill-wishers have been received for a long time. Two months ago believers received an anonymous note about some trouble that was being planned against them. A fire investigation that was conducted confirmed the suspicion: traces of spilled gasoline were found with which the unknown persons tried to set fire to the pile of wood beside the building.

Believers filed a request that a criminal case be opened. There already are several suspects.

We note that the majority of the village's residents work as lumberjacks. However in connection with the recent economic crisis, many of them have remained without work, which has promoted the growth of general unhappiness and abuse of alcoholic beverages. On the whole the population treats Jehovah's Witnesses with respect, since they are known as model citizens, many of whom were exiled to Siberia for their faith during the time of

Stalinist repressions. Nevertheless, there have been recent manifestations of hostility. Thus, in the spring of 2010 an elderly Jehovah's Witness who lived in the village suffered severe beatings. (tr. by PDS, posted 29 November 2010)

Duma acts on law on church property

Bill on transfer of property to religious organizations passes second reading in state Duma

Interfax-Religiia (17.11.2010) / HRWF (18.11.2010) - <http://www.hrwf.net> - The State Duma adopted on second reading the draft law "On transfer to religious organizations property of religious significance owned by the state or municipalities."

It was stipulated that property can be transferred by the appropriate federal, regional, or municipal agency of government to religious organization either in ownership of the property or for free use for a specific period.

In so doing, the time for the transfer cannot exceed two years from the date of the adoption of the specific decision.

In the event that the property being transferred is living quarters, citizens residing in them must be offered alternative residences in a timely manner.

The votes in favor of adoption of the bill were 353, with 53 opposed.

The bill determines all information that must be included in the plan for transfer of property that is drawn up and approved by the authoritative agency of state or municipal government. In particular, this plan must include information about the sources and amount of the financial requirements of measures for evicting of citizens from the living quarters they occupy and providing them other residences.

The bill guarantees the right of juridical and physical persons to appeal in court against the decision of the agency responsible for the transfer of property, if these persons do not agree with such a decision. Along with this, the responsible agency has the right to refuse a religious organization's request for transfer of property if it indicates the reasons for the refusal. The law provides that such a refusal does not preclude a second submission by the religious organization of its application after the removal of the indicated impediments.

The law establishes a mandatory process of public transparency in the transfer of property to religious organizations. For this reason, the responsible agency is required to post on its web site the application from the religious organization within a week of its receipt. It also must post the positive or negative decision of the responsible agency.

The law stipulates that if state or municipal property to which a religious organization makes a claim is leased to a third party, such a lease remains in effect until the date specified in the official documents. (tr. by PDS, posted 17 November 2010)

Trial of Jehovah's Witness resumes

Representative of office of plenipotentiary for human rights appears in defense of Jehovah's Witness in criminal case in Gorno-Altaiisk

Portal-credu.ru (17.11.2010) / HRWF (18.11.2010) - <http://www.hrwf.net> - On 15 November at 10.00 in the morning, Judge Marina Sokolovskaia resumed the judicial session in the criminal case against believer Alexander Kalistratov, accused of arousing religious enmity (part 1, Art. 282 of Criminal Code of RF), the press service of the Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia reports.

The believer's interests were represented by attorneys Viktor Zhenkov, Arli Chimirov, and Viktor Shipilov. As previously, Assistant Prosecutor Bulat Yaimov appeared for the prosecution.

The first hearings in Kalistratov's case in Gorno-Altaiisk city court were held from 20 to 22 October 2010. Thirty-seven witnesses were questioned by the prosecution. Not one of them confirmed Kalistratov's guilt in incitement of religious hostility or strife. Another 22 witnesses are expected to be questioned by the prosecution.

At the beginning of the session, Alexander Kalistratov requested that Mikhail Odintsov, who was present in the courtroom, be admitted to the court in the capacity of defense in the criminal case along with the attorneys. Since in presenting evidence the prosecution had appealed to documents assessing the contents of theological texts in terms of their compliance with existing legislation, Kalistratov considered it necessary to draw in a specialist in this area, which Mikhail Odintsov is. Mikhail Odintsov is the president of a Russia-wide public organization, "The Association for Study of Religion;" he works in the office of the plenipotentiary for human rights in the Russian federation in the post of head of the Department for Protection of Freedom of Conscience, he participated in the preparation of conclusions in a governmental religious studies expert analysis with regard to the centralized religious organization of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia by way of a careful study of the doctrinal teachings and their expression in corresponding printed materials with regard to arousing enmity and strife. He also participated in the development of the federal law of 26 September 1997 "On freedom of conscience and religious associations."

The judge granted the petition regarding admission of the representative of the office of plenipotentiary for human rights Mikhail Odintsov as a defender of Kalistratov in the criminal case.

Then the trial proceeded to questioning of witnesses. During the judicial session four witnesses for the prosecution were questioned: a dispatcher for a shipping company, an Orthodox priest, a woman who attended worship meetings of the Jehovah's Witnesses, and a specialist in public relations from the administration of Gorno-Altaiisk.

Once again not one of those questioned confirmed Kalistratov's guilt of incitement of religious strife. It turned out that Sergei Bashkatov who is a retired priest in the village of Maim agreed to testify although he did not know Kalistratov personally. He did not present a single argument in favor of the indictment of Alexander Kalistratov for incitement of religious strife but he reported that he "doesn't like it" when Jehovah's Witnesses converse with him using the Bible. "I am not accustomed to such a thing," the priest explained. He accused Jehovah's Witnesses of pressure tactics, although he said that he conversed with them by his own volition. It also turned out that he is acquainted with Jehovah's Witnesses

exclusively by means of the books of the anti-cult figure Alexander Dvorkin. To a question by the representative of the office of the plenipotentiary for human rights whether Dvorkin's views correspond with the position of the Orthodox church, the priest said: "To a great extent, yes. Although his views have a rather subjective character, but Dvorkin's book on sect studies is approved by the church."

After the priest gave a negative assessment of Jehovah's Witnesses, Mikhail Odintsov asked him: "Are you acquainted with the social activity of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia and abroad?"

"No."

"Is it really possible to characterize the Jehovah's Witnesses without taking this activity into account? Is not your assessment of the activity of other organizations based exclusively on the positions of the Orthodox church?"

There was no response.

To the question "Why did you decide to give testimony in court?" the priest answered: "I have three children. I do not want my children to understand sacred scripture in the way Jehovah's Witnesses understand it. That is my goal in coming here."

Here is how the attorney Zhenkov commented on these words: "Any father has the right to decide how to educate his child. But to restrict the right of several hundred thousand citizens of Russia to confess their faith only because a priest does not want his children to believe in God the way Jehovah's Witnesses do is nonsense."

After the representative of the administration was questioned, Judge Sokolovskaia announced the termination of the judicial hearing because the working day had ended. (tr. by PDS, posted 17 November 2010)

Many church buildings not worth restoring to religious organizations

What is to be done with "Church of the Savior on potatoes"? Committee on Religious Affairs of State Duma prepared amendments to draft law on transfer of property to religious organizations

by Dmitry Karelin

Gazeta.ru (12.11.2010) / HRWF (13.11.2010) - <http://www.hrwf.net> - Participants in the discussion of the controversial bill on the transfer of property to religious organizations have reached a compromise. Deputies and representatives of RPTs reviewed more than 100 amendments to the document and now they say that on key questions there are no disagreements. However, several developers of the draft think that there still are serious gaps in it.

On Thursday the State Duma Committee on Affairs of Public Associations and Religious Organizations discussed amendments to the draft law "On transfer to religious organizations of property of religious significance." Work on the document was begun back in 2009 on the

initiative of the Ministry of Finance, Russian Property, and the Russian Orthodox church and it was introduced into the parliament in June of this year.

The first reading of the draft law, which the museum community and RPTs quarreled over for a long time, occurred on 22 September and since then more than 100 amendments have been composed, a counselor for the State Duma Committee on Affairs of Public Associations and Religious Organizations, Stepan Medvedko, told "Gazeta.ru."

The original version of the document said that items of religious significance that is federal, state, and municipal property will be transferred to religious organizations as their property or for free use. This involves not only monuments of architecture but also "property of religious significance," like icons. Religious organizations will not be able to lay claim to objects that are included in UNESCO's list of items of world heritage. Also the original version of the bill said that it will not regulate the transfer of museum valuables to the church, and it was this point that served as the beginning of open conflict between art experts and historians and the Russian Orthodox church. The former claimed that the church actually intended to empty the museums' storerooms, although it would not be able to preserve valuable icons because of a lack of experience on the part of clergy and adequate resources. In March of this year directors of the largest Russian museums and art experts, including those from the Tretyakov Gallery, published open letters to Patriarch Kirill, suggesting that he renounce claims to museum valuables, and in June they quarreled with representatives of RPTs at a "round table" in the Public Chamber. Art experts demanded that they be given access to a full discussion and the opportunity to participate in further development of the draft law, accusing RPTs of unhealthy ambitions, and the clergy responded that museum workers "simply fear losing money."

However, by the time the bill was introduced in the State Duma, the church had reached agreement with the museum community.

The document contains the provision that monuments of architecture maintained by the state will be transferred only to centralized church structures and not to local religious organizations. Also a separate article states that the church renounces claims to religious property in the Museum Fund.

"And if it is possible to speak of concessions, then at yesterday's session of the committee, a very real compromise was reached," Medvedko claims. He said that in addition to "a number of purely technical question" agreement with the Ministry of Culture and Ministry of Finance was reached "on key issues."

Medvedko said that now the draft law specifically says that a religious organization is obliged to maintain monuments of culture in proper condition and regularly (the precise deadlines will be worked out subsequently) restore them and "conduct other work for their preservation."

In addition, the head of the synodal Department on Relations of the Church and Society of the Moscow patriarchate, Archpriest Vsevolod Chaplin, told Interfax that the bill contains a point that says that when they are evicted from buildings of religious significance, cultural institutions will previously have been offered facilities of equal value, as the Ministry of Culture demanded. The same pertains to buildings owned by the housing fund, as suggested by Russian Property.

"In addition, the document now contains wording about equal access of citizens to buildings that are both museums and objects of religious significance. In the course of subsequent

hearings this will be developed in more detail," Medvedko said. The second reading, during which, according to "Gazeta.ru's" source in the working group of developers of the draft law, all amendments approved at the committee session will be adopted, will occur on 17 November 2010.

However, an expert of the State Duma Committee on Affairs of Religious Organizations, Mikhail Shakhov, who participated in developing the draft law, thinks that there are still serious gaps in the document. "There are no problems with the point that says religious organizations will be required to take care of monuments of architecture and restore them in a timely fashion. The present legislation is adequate because a religious organization in any case cannot engage in restoration by its own efforts and it will be required to turn to experts itself or appeal to the state for help," he told "Gazeta.ru."

But in the expert's opinion the bill in its current form does not give an answer to what will become of dilapidated churches and buildings that RPTs does not want to take ownership of. "In Russia there are still very many such buildings which were converted by the soviet government for economic needs or completely vacated and they stand abandoned. Often they are in catastrophic shape and it is too expensive to restore them even for the state, to say nothing of religious organizations," Shakhov said. He said that members of the working group still cannot understand how to fix this hole in the bill. "Theoretically, the government should take care of such structures, but it still works out in practice that if the church does not ask to own them, they will slowly crumble and nobody needs them." (tr. by PDS, posted 12 November 2010)

Law for transfer of property to churches ready for Duma

Bill on religious property will be reviewed on second reading 17 November

Interfax-Religiia (11.11.2010) / HRWF (12.11.2010) - <http://www.hrwf.net> - The State Duma Committee on Affairs of Public Associations and Religious Organizations on Thursday discussed amendments to the draft law on transfer of property of religious significance to religious organizations.

"We have found the most optimal version. It is impossible to find the ideal; everyone should understand this, but we have found an optimal one, so as to protect and guard and at the same time not delay the process of transfer to religious organizations," the head of the duma committee, Sergei Popov, told an Interfax-Religiis correspondent with regard to the results of the session.

He reported that the second reading of the draft law will occur in the State Duma on 17 November.

The Deputy minister of economic development of RF, Igor Manylov, noted during the discussion of amendments that this version, which is proposed in them, "really strengthens and protects the interests of institutions of culture while at the same time it does not block the possibility of the process of transfer (of religious property—IR)."

On his part, the head of the synodal Department for Relations of Church and Society, Archpriest Vsevolod Chaplin, sharing his impressions from the session, told the news agency that "the draft law was improved and on some points they managed to achieve a difficult compromise."

He said that the obligations of religious organizations were made more precise as to the maintenance of monuments of culture, conditions for access to them, procedures and deadlines for performing restoration, repair, and other projects for their preservation.

"That is, the concern that was expressed by many representatives of the cultural community received a proper response. Obviously, religious societies must be concerned about the preservation of monuments of culture and they will do this, as they have done hitherto," the priest said.

He added, the document clearly says that when they are removed from buildings of religious significance, cultural institutions will be offered beforehand premises of equal value, guaranteeing the entirety of their activity. Concern was also shown that there not be an infringement of the interests of people evicted from buildings belonging to the housing fund.

Besides, according to Fr Vsevolod, the interests of renters have been separately handled: if a building that is state property is under lease, it cannot be transferred to the use of religious organizations if the renter himself does not withdraw from the lease before its expiration date. On the other hand, ownership can be transferred, but in such an event the rent will go to the new owner, that is, to some religious organization.

"Work has reached the finish line. I hope that we will cross it quickly," the priest concluded.

Twelve ongoing criminal cases against Jehovah's Witnesses

New criminal cases on "extremism" charge against Jehovah's Witnesses opened in Salekhard and Kemerovo

Portal-credu.ru (05.11.2010) / HRWF (06.11.2010) - <http://www.hrwf.net> - New criminal cases against Jehovah's Witnesses on a charge of "extremism" have been filed in Salekhard (one) and Kemerovo (four), the press service of the Administrative Center of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia reports.

In Salekhard (Yamalo-Nenetsk AO) on 6 September 2010 a criminal case on the basis of part 1 of article 282 of the Criminal Code of RF was opened against "unidentified representatives of the Jehovah's Witnesses religious organization." The decree was signed by A. Serotetto, acting director for investigation of especially important cases of the Investigation Committee for Yamalo-Nenetsk Autonomous District (AO). It should be noted that after this, in the evening of 21 October 2010, a search was conducted in the apartment of Jehovah's Witnesses in Salekhard. The warrant was issued by the Salekhard city court. Religious literature was confiscated. The search lasted all night.

In Kemerovo, criminal cases were opened on the basis of articles "incitement of religious enmity" and "organizing an extremist community." We note that in May 2010 the head of the Center for Combating Extremism for Kemerovo province, V. Bannikov, sent the charter for the local Jehovah's Witnesses religious organization for expert analysis in the Kemerovo diocese of RPTsMP. The plenipotentiary for human rights in the Russian Federation, in his report for 2009, condemned "cases where organs of the state formulate their attitude toward one confession relying on 'expert' assessments given by representatives of another confession."

Thus, currently in Russia at least 12 criminal cases on article 282 of the Criminal Code of RF have been filed against Jehovah's Witnesses. Criminal cases have been initiated in the cities of Asbest (Sverdlov province), Gorno-Altaiisk (Altai republic), Yoshkar-Ola, Kemerovo, Omsk, Salekhard, Tambov, Tula, and Cheliabinsk.

Christian churches torched in Muslim region

Official statement of Russian Union of Evangelical Christians Baptists on arson of churches in Karachaevo-Cherkessia

Press Service of RSEKhB (03.11.2010) / HRWF (04.11.2010) - <http://www.hrwf.net> - Late in the evening of 31 October 2010, a day when many protestant churches celebrate the Day of the Reformation, in the city of Karachaevsk arson was committed in three Christian churches in which local residents, Christians, have for many years held weekly worship services. Flames engulfed two Russian Orthodox church building and one house of prayer of Evangelical Christians-Baptists. A group of unidentified persons, acting simultaneously, committed the arson of buildings where Christians gather.

The perpetrators threw flaming objects into the premises of the churches through window openings. The damaged building of the church of Evangelical Christians-Baptists has gathered together under its roof every Sunday more than 300 persons, which apparently was the reason for the arson. Although the investigation is still ongoing, it is possible to say with certainty that the arson was a planned action for the purpose of provoking interconfessional and interethnic strife in the republic of Karachaevo-Cherkesia and in the northern Caucasus as a whole.

In this regard, the Russian Union of Evangelical Christians-Baptists [RSEKhB] officially declares that all local churches that are members of the union will continue their spiritual mission to which God has called them, and also they will not succumb to prevocational forces that wish to undermine the fragile interconfessional peace and stability in this complex region. The leadership of the Russian Union of EKHB will do everything possible in order to render effective help to its brethren in the faith, who have fallen into such difficult living conditions. In the name of all churches of the Russian Union of EKHB, we thank the authorities of the republic of Karachaevo-Cherkessia for willingness to provide comprehensive help in restoration of the buildings of the Christian churches damaged by fire.

We hope that law enforcement agencies will conduct a comprehensive investigation and bring the perpetrators to account.

We believe that such events have be fully and correctly evaluated by representatives of the Ecclesiastical Board of Muslims of the Northern Caucasus. We agree with the words of the chief mufti of the republic of Chechnya, Sultan Mirzaeva, who said: "It is not necessary to fear those who believe in the Almighty; it is necessary to fear those who do not believe in him."

We pray for interconfessional peace and social stability in the northern Caucasus.

Orthodox church criticizes European Court ruling

Ezhednevnyi zhurnal

Portal-credu.ru (01.11.2010) / HRWF (11.11.2010) - <http://www.hrwf.net> - Representative of the Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) in Strasbourg thinks decision of European Court for Human Rights finding Moscow authorities' refusal for conducting gay parades illegal tramples upon feelings of majority of Russians.

Hegumen Filaret, the representative of the Russian church in Strasbourg, thinks that the decision of the European court finding illegal the refusals of Moscow authorities to allow gay parades tramples upon the feelings of a majority of Russians. "The decision made in Strasbourg, in essence, is violence against the feelings and moral position of the greater part of society. It can hardly serve the declared goal of cultivating tolerance and achieving harmony, mutual understanding and peaceful coexistence," Father Filaret stated in an interview with "Interfax-Religiia."

He did not rule out the possibility that if such cases gain strength, then "the Russian church, following its own social teaching, may support ever more blatant appeals to the Russian government to review the forms of its participation in international agreements dealing with the protection of human rights."

In the priest's opinion, the problem connected with this particular ruling of the court is much wider and more serious than the immediate conduct of or refusal to allow the conduct of gay parades.

"The norms of human rights were created for the protection of individuals from discrimination. Instead of that, in recent years we have more and more often faced the formal application of standards of protection of rights with respect to groups and communities of people, principally various minorities, without regard to traditions of society as a whole and its cultural and historic memory," Fr Filaret noted.

In his opinion, the problem is that "having rewritten in detail the obligations of the majority which is supposed to protect the minority, the rights protection paradigm has totally rejected the principle of the obligation of the minority to society as a whole," while this pertains not only to sexual minorities but also national, linguistic, and religious minorities as well as others.

Meanwhile, the priest is sure, it is wrong to demand respect for one's self, pursuing "exclusively personal goals," without a corresponding respect for the traditions of the majority. "This will inevitably lead to conflicts and confrontation. And such decisions of the Strasbourg court not only will not lead to true harmony in society and respect for the rights of every individual, but will serve to provoke new points of tension," Fr Filaret said.

City government to provide land for 200 new Orthodox churches in Moscow

Sobianin orders allocation of land for construction of church in Butovo

Interfax-Religiia (27.10.2010) / HRWF (02.10.2010) - <http://www.hrwf.net> - Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobianin signed an order regarding provision of a parcel of land for construction of an Orthodox church on Yuzhnobutovo Street, a source in the city administration told Interfax on Wednesday.

The church of the Nativity of Christ in Chernevo will be situated on a 0.9-hectare lot. It is planned for construction to be complete in 2015.

It was earlier reported that capital authorities intend to authorize plots for 200 Orthodox churches by the end of 2010.

The suggestion to erect 200 new churches in Moscow was advanced by Patriarch of Moscow and all-Rus Kirill.

Building mosque in Moscow on hold

Moscow authorities officially do not allocate land for construction of mosque in Tekstilshchiki-prefecture

Interfax-Religiia (25.10.2010) / HRWF (02.11.2010) - <http://www.hrwf.net> - The government of Moscow officially did not provide land for the construction of a mosque on Volga Boulevard in the Tekstilshchiki region, the prefecture of the South Eastern Administrative District of the city reported in a letter sent to the Moscow City Duma.

This document was read at a joint session of a number of specialized commissions of the Moscow City Duma on Monday by a deputy of the city parliament, Liudmila Stebenkova, in whose electoral district Tekstilshchiki is located.

"At the present time, in connection with the objections of residents to the construction of the mosque on the specified parcel of land, the prefecture sent an appeal to the mayor of Moscow suggesting relocation of the mosque to another plot," the letter says.

The prefecture also recalls that a final decision on construction of a mosque must be made after conducting public hearings, in accordance with the Urban Construction Code of Moscow.

As has been reported, the mosque of the Council of Muftis was planned for construction on Volga Boulevard in a green zone of the Tekstilshchiki region. Plans for construction evoked dissatisfaction of many Muscovites, primarily local residents.

Followers of Krishna may build house of worship

Moscow Mayor Resin allocated Krishnaites two hectares for temple in north Moscow

Interfax-Religiia (26.10.2010) / HRWF (02.11.2010) - <http://www.hrwf.net> - On Novoskhodnen Highway beyond the Moscow Ring, in the north of Moscow, a Krishnaites temple will be built, Interfax was told on Tuesday by a source in the city administration.

"Last week, Acting Mayor Vladimir Resin signed a city government order allocating to the Moscow Society of Krishna Consciousness a 2-hectare parcel of land in the village of Vereskino, for construction of a temple," the agency's source said.

In accordance with this document, the Krishnaites are obliged in 2011 to draw up plans for the temple and receive permission for its construction.

Vandalism against religious buildings

Sova Center (18.10.2010) / HRWF (20.10.2010) - <http://www.hrwf.net> - As compared to the last summer, the number of neo-Nazi and xenophobic vandalism has slightly diminished: 20 cases recorded in June to August 2010 (22 were recorded previous summer). Nine of them belong to the 'ideological vandalism' (Nazi symbols and xenophobic slogans on a monument to Karl Marx and a memorial to the liquidators of the Tshernobyl disaster, graffiti expressing solidarity with neo-Nazi prisoners, etc.), three were committed against Jewish and three against Muslim objects (the most dramatic incident was the blowing up of a synagogue in Tver), two against Orthodox objects (including an arson attack against a cappella in St. Petersburg), one against a Protestant object (arson attack against a Baptist house of worship in Kurgan) and one against an Armenian object. After we had been watching the rise of vandals' activity for two years, in summer 2010, the situation stabilized. This happened due to the reduction of the 'ideological vandalism', mostly due to the clear reduction of public advertizing of networked ultra-right groups, the Russian Image (Russkiy Obraz) and the Resistance (Soprotivlenie), which had practiced coordinated graffiti actions all through Russia before.

In all, since the beginning of the year, SOVA Center has registered 79 acts of neo-Nazi and xenophobic vandalism, of which 49 are those of 'ideological' vandalism.

Among religious groups, the most popular target since the beginning of the year have been Jehovah's Witnesses. At least 10 vandals' attacks were committed against their objects including two arsons. Apart from them, attacks were registered against Jewish and Muslim objects (six in each including the blowing up in Tver), Orthodox (four incidents including two arson attacks), Protestant (three incidents including two arson attacks), Armenian and Neopagan objects (one incident in each)

Source: Summer 2010: Victories of the ultra-right propaganda

Russia sees sharp increase in human rights violations

JWOM (11.10.2010) / HRWF (14.10.2010) - <http://www.hrwf.net> - "It turned out to be a significant date for freedom of conscience in our country, but not in a good way," said Yaroslav Sivulsky, member of the Presiding Committee of the Administrative Center of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia. "On September 11, 2009, the Rostov Regional Court rendered a decision to liquidate the Taganrog Community of Jehovah's Witnesses and to declare as 'extremist' 34 religious publications of Jehovah's Witnesses." Reviewing the results, it can be stated that the religious climate in Russia has dramatically deteriorated since that day. Hundreds of incidents of human rights violations against Jehovah's Witnesses continue to be reported nationwide, including searches, arrests, and disruptions of religious services.

A number of international human rights organizations sent a statement to Dmitry Medvedev, president of the Russian Federation to "express concern over violations of the rights of communities of Jehovah's Witnesses in the Russian Federation." It stated in part that the declaring of the religious literature of Jehovah's Witnesses as extremist "was based on dishonest, 'made to order' studies conducted by experts picked by the prosecutor's office" and "turns tens of thousands of believers into criminals. . . . Criminal prosecution for one's faith could at any time become a reality."

This has now become reality. Attorney Victor Zhenkov relates: "At present, seven criminal cases have been initiated against Jehovah's Witnesses in Tambov, Chelyabinsk, Asbest, Gorno-Altaysk, Omsk, Yoshkar-Ola, and Tula."

During the past year, there were disruptions of religious meetings of Jehovah's Witnesses, hundreds of incidents of detainment of Witnesses (frequently accompanied by unlawful personal searches and fingerprinting), and numerous cases of vandalism on Kingdom Halls and private homes of Witnesses where meetings are held. Witnesses were particularly affected in the districts of Rostov, Belgorod, Tambovskiy Region, Altayskiy Kray, and Bashkortostan.

Victor Zhenkov notes, "Galina Prishchenko, representative of the Rostov Region Prosecutor's Office who presented the government's request to the RF Supreme Court to uphold the decision of the Rostov Regional Court, represented to the Court that the decision would only affect the Taganrog Community. If that is so, then why do we have officials bursting into the homes of believers after dark to conduct searches or secretly setting up video surveillance in apartments in Chelyabinsk, Yoshkar-Ola, and other cities?"

Criminal charge against Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia continues

7 October

JWOM (07.10.2010) / HRWF (14.10.2010) - <http://www.hrwf.net> - On October 7, 2010, a preliminary hearing was held at the Gorno-Altaysk City Court in the criminal case against Aleksandr Kalistratov. Judge Marina Sokolovskaya scheduled the hearing of the case on its merits for October 20, 2010, at 9:00 a.m. Kalistratov was charged with inciting religious enmity because he gave two internationally distributed religious magazines to someone who asked for them. However, it was not until a year later that the magazines were labeled as "extremist" by the Supreme Court of the Altay Republic.

The legal prosecution of Jehovah's Witnesses in the city of Gorno-Altaysk started with an expert study performed by Yuliya Khvastunova. "Mrs. Khvastunova has displayed a pattern of opposition to our activity and the fact that her 'comprehensive study' of 27 of our publications took only three days to complete causes us to question the objectivity of her findings," noted Kalistratov's attorney Viktor Zhenkov. On the basis of her study the Gorno-Altaysk prosecutor filed charges of religious extremism, and on October 1, 2009, the Gorno-Altaysk Court declared 18 religious publications produced and distributed by Jehovah's Witnesses as extremist. On January 27, 2010, the Supreme Court of the Altay Republic upheld that decision, which has now been appealed to the European Court of Human Rights.

On the basis of the Gorno-Altaysk City Court's decision and a similar decision by the Rostov Regional Court, Aleksandr Kalistratov was accused of violating Article 282(1) of the Russian

Federation Criminal Code ("Inciting Hatred or Hostility, and the Debasing of Human Dignity"). Throughout the year, secret surveillance operations have been conducted on Mr. Kalistratov and other Witnesses in Gorno-Altaysk, including phone tapping and interception of mail by order of the Directorate of the FSB for the Altay Republic. "Discrimination against believers has escalated from multiple violations of constitutional rights and freedoms to outright persecution," states Vasily Kalin, Chairman of the Administrative Center of Jehovah's Witnesses.

Aleksandr Kalistratov received a bill of indictment on September 9, 2010. Zhenkov commented: "It is remarkable that the prosecutor spent just three working days reviewing the information, since the case materials fill 13 volumes. There is no way to analyze so much material in such a short time. Additionally, the prosecutor for the Altay Republic refused to consider nine complaints from the defending lawyer highlighting the unlawful manner of the investigation." There is no evidence that since the January 27 decision Kalistratov has distributed any publications that have been deemed by a court to be extremist.

Kalistratov expressed his personal thoughts about the proceedings this way: "I am not surprised; many Christians have suffered persecution. Christian love for God and neighbor will help me to endure all of this."

Exhibitors fail to overturn fines for art insulting church

EarthTimes (04.10.2010) / HRWF (04.10.2010) - <http://www.hrwf.net> - Two art exhibitors are considering taking their case to the European Court of Human Rights after a Russian court Monday upheld heavy fines against them for staging a 2007 art show the Russian Orthodox church considered "insulting."

Andrey Yerofeyev and Yuri Samodurov were found guilty in July of inciting religious hatred and violating human dignity for presenting the show, which included: religious icons of caviar; an image of Jesus blended with the logo of a fast food chain; and images of Mickey Mouse as a holy figure.

Russian Orthodox Christians complained about the 2007 show, saying it attacked their religious sensibilities.

And, on Monday, an appeals court upheld a previous ruling that Samodurov would be fined 200,000 rubles (6,550 dollars), while Yerofeyev would be fined 150,000 rubles.

The fines apply only to the two men who exhibited the art, not the artists who created it.

A group of 30 Orthodox church members appeared at the trial, reported Russian media, calling not only for the fines, but for the offending artworks to be destroyed.

"Everything is possible in our country, but I hope it doesn't come to the destruction of the pictures," said Anna Stavizkaya, Yerofeyev's lawyer.

Yerofeyev currently has possession of the art. Stavizkaya said she hopes to appeal the case to the European Court of Human Rights.

Yerofeyev's had aimed to challenge political and religious taboos in Russian art through the show. Civil rights activists and leaders of Russian art institutions have criticized the ruling against the two as art censorship.

Yerofeyev has been released from his job as curator of the world famous Tretyakov Gallery since the display.

Will Russia extradite reader of Muslim theologian to Uzbekistan?

By Felix Corley

Forum 18 (22.09.2010) / HRWF (27.09.2010) - <http://www.hrwf.net> - Human rights defenders fear that if Uzbek migrant Bobirjon Tukhtamurodov – arrested on 18 August in the Russian city of Novosibirsk after an Uzbek request – is extradited to his native Uzbekistan he will face certain imprisonment and possible torture. The Uzbek authorities allege that he is a religious extremist as part of a group allegedly spreading the teachings of the late Turkish Muslim theologian Said Nursi. Although Tukhtamurodov is being held in Novosibirsk, the decision on extradition will be taken by Russia's General Prosecutor's Office in Moscow, an official of the Regional Prosecutor's Office confirmed to Forum 18 News Service from Novosibirsk.

The 35-year-old Tukhtamurodov, who is from the Uzbek city of Bukhara [Bukhoro] and married with three children, had fled to Russia in February 2010 after being warned that his arrest was likely, his supporters told Forum 18.

Uzbek and Russian campaigns

Tukhtamurodov's younger brother Botir was given a six-year prison term by Uzbekistan at the end of a large trial of Nursi readers in Bukhara in April 2009. Their appeals were rejected in June 2009. Muslim readers of Nursi's works are regularly given long prison sentences in Uzbekistan, and Protestant Christians and Jehovah's Witnesses are regularly given very short jail terms.

In Russia, Jehovah's Witnesses and Muslim readers of Nursi's works are the target of a nationwide campaign by the authorities. Ilham Islamlı became in August the first Russian Nursi reader to be convicted under the Criminal Code and punished under extremism-related charges, when he was sentenced to ten months' detention suspended for one year. Another Nursi reader in Dagestan, Ziyautdin Dapayev, faces a continuing criminal investigation.

Uzbek policeman in Moscow states accusations

Abdulla Kazakov of Bukhara regional police in Uzbekistan, who worked on the case, told Forum 18 that Tukhtamurodov is guilty of extremism and the Uzbek authorities are expecting his extradition.

"Our Bukhara regional National Security Service [NSS secret police] investigated the case," he told Forum 18 on 20 September from Moscow, where he said he was working on another case. "We arrested Tukhtamurodov in Novosibirsk, as he didn't appear when he was summoned to court in Bukhara in April. Our work is now finished." He denied that he had been present at Tukhtamurodov's arrest.

Kazakov said Tukhtamurodov is accused of violating two Articles of the Uzbek Criminal Code: Article 244-1, Part 3 ("preparation or distribution of materials threatening public security and public order"), which carries a maximum penalty of three years' imprisonment, and 244-2, Part 1 ("creation, leadership or participation in religious extremist, separatist or fundamentalist or other banned organisations"), which is punishable by five to fifteen years' imprisonment.

First Nusi reader to be extradited from Russia?

Kazakov added that the investigation of his case was led by investigator Abdurahim Kilichev of Bukhara regional NSS secret police. However, officials there told Forum 18 on 20 September that Kilichev was away on a work trip and no-one else was available to discuss Tukhtamurodov's case.

Lidiya Ozdoeva of Novosibirsk Regional Prosecutor's Office confirmed to Forum 18 the Uzbek charges against Tukhtamurodov. She said the Uzbek authorities claim he is a member of the Nurcilar movement following the teachings of the late Turkish Muslim theologian Said Nursi.

Readers of Nursi's works in both Russia and Uzbekistan insist that no such organised movement exists.

Although the Russian authorities have frequently extradited to Uzbekistan suspects the Uzbek authorities regard as extremists, Forum 18 believes this is the first time this has been used against a reader of Nursi's works.

Call to reject extradition request

Yelena Ryabinina, Head of the Right to Asylum Programme of the Moscow-based Human Rights Institute, called for the Russian authorities to reject the extradition request. "This and similar cases from Uzbekistan are ideological persecution," she told Forum 18 from Moscow on 21 September. "People are being sought and prosecuted not because of any extremist actions, but because of what they read. The Uzbek authorities regard any religious or political dissidence or independent activity as a threat that must be crushed."

Ryabinina points to the Shanghai Co-operation Organisation (SCO), of which both Uzbekistan and Russia are members. "SCO members have agreed a joint approach to what they regard as terrorism, extremism and separatism," she complained. "Any reason to persecute people in one SCO state is enough to persecute them in others. This has a catastrophic influence on the fate of individuals."

Ryabinina of the Human Rights Institute fears that if Tukhtamurodov is returned to Uzbekistan, he is likely to be tortured and given a long term of imprisonment. "Uzbekistan has a ban on torture, but this is ignored and Uzbekistan practices torture systematically," she declared. "There is an international ban on extraditing individuals to countries where torture is practised – and Russia should abide by this. We are ready to take this case as far as the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg if we have to."

The use or threat of torture by Uzbekistan is often reported by victims of religious freedom violations, although they normally do not wish to publicly testify to torture and other forms of brutality.

Police officer states Uzbek officials not involved in arrest

Tukhtamurodov was detained at a Traffic Police post in Novosibirsk soon after midnight on 18 August. The following day the IslamNews.ru agency, quoting the Society for Political Immigrants from Central Asia, said he was one of the passengers in a car returning from Tarawih night prayers (held during Ramadan) in a local mosque when the car was stopped.

The Society accused some Russian officials of a conspiracy with the Uzbek secret police to arrest Tukhtamurodov, viewing the arrest as part of a long-running Uzbek "hunt for dissidents" currently living in Russia. It claimed that the plainclothes men who detained him presented no documents, and that one of them spoke Uzbek.

However Aleksandr Tokarev, an officer of the Novosibirsk regional police Counterextremism Department, who admitted to Forum 18 that he had been present during the arrest, insisted that all those arresting Tukhtamurodov had been Russian officials. "No-one was there from Uzbekistan," he told Forum 18 from Novosibirsk on 20 September with a laugh. He insisted that he and his fellow officers had identified themselves and presented documentation to back up their arrest.

Tokarev told Forum 18 that Tukhtamurodov has been ordered held in Novosibirsk's Investigation Prison No. 1 until an extradition decision is given.

"That's a state secret"

Asked how the police had known that Tukhtamurodov had been in the car, Tokarev responded: "That's a state secret."

Tokarev said his Centre no longer had a role in the case. "We don't establish guilt – that's an issue for the Prosecutor's Office," he told Forum 18. "Tukhtamurodov was wanted internationally and we just fulfilled the warrant."

The Traffic Police and local police Counterextremism Departments have previously also been used to stop and search Russian Jehovah's Witnesses and Muslim readers of Said Nursi's works for literature banned under anti-extremism legislation. It is unclear how these agencies know which vehicles and individuals to search, but the FSB security service is known to in a co-ordinated manner closely watch their believers and communities.

Case now with General Prosecutor's Office

Ozdoeva of Novosibirsk Regional Prosecutor's Office told Forum 18 that her Office had concluded that Tukhtamurodov should be extradited to Uzbekistan in accordance with Article 56 of the Commonwealth of Independent States' 1993 Convention on Legal Assistance and Legal Relations on Civil, Family and Criminal Cases.

Ozdoeva added that the case has now been transferred to the General Prosecutor's Office in Moscow, which will take the decision.

Asked why her Office seems to have accepted at face value the accusations against Tukhtamurodov levelled by the Uzbek authorities, Ozdoeva insisted that her Office was not in a position to verify the accusations. "If Uzbekistan sends documents that a criminal investigation is underway against someone, it is our role to complete the paperwork," she told Forum 18. "If he objects to the charges, Tukhtamurodov can defend his rights – he has a lawyer and has access to all the paperwork."

Will General Prosecutor's Office agree to extradition?

Russia's General Prosecutor's Office in Moscow declined to discuss Tukhtamurodov's case by telephone, insisting it can only respond to questions submitted in writing.

Tukhtamurodov's lawyer, Igor Khryachkov, told Forum 18 from Novosibirsk on 20 September that it could be several months before the General Prosecutor's Office rules on the extradition, as it will have to liaise also with the General Prosecutor's Office in Uzbekistan. In the meantime, he said he would try to have his client freed as he awaits the decision. "But it's unlikely the court will overturn the detention decision."

Asked whether the General Prosecutor's Office is likely to accede to the Uzbek extradition request, Khryachkov said that in law it had the possibility to reject it. "But it's not clear if they will."

Protests against mosques in Moscow to continue

Building complex. Why Orthodox activists stir up muscovites against Mosques

by Pavel Korobov

PDS (21.09.2010) / HRWF (23.09.2010) - <http://www.hrwf.net> - The Orthodox community has opposed the building of a mosque on Volzhskii Boulevard of Moscow; believers called the capital authorities to rescind a decision regarding its construction. Representatives of the Russian Orthodox church, in their turn, have called the authorities to heed the opinion of residents of the region, who also have opposed building the mosque.

Yesterday the Orthodox community was drawn into the struggle against erecting a mosque in southeast Moscow. The outcry around building a house of worship arose after the leaders of the Council of Muftis of Russia at the beginning of September managed to persuade the prefect of the Southeast Administrative Region, Vladimir Zotov, regarding this plan. A land parcel of 0.4 hectares was allotted for the building. However on 11 September local residents staged a protest demonstration. "We want the officials who would make the decision to heed the opinion of local residents: whether there is to be a mosque and medrasah or a wonderful park for general recreation," a statement of the organizers of the action said.

Yesterday Orthodox people supported the protest. "What have sent to the mayor of Moscow a demand: until the program for the construction of 600 Orthodox churches in Moscow is completed, not a single mosque should be built," the director of the Association of Orthodox Experts, Kirill Frolov, declared to Kommersant. "Otherwise we will hold a protest demonstration." "Moscow should not be made a Muslim city; this will evoke tension within society," the head of the Union of Orthodox Brotherhoods, Leonid Simonovich-Nikshich, said in support. "We will participate actively in protest demonstrations."

There are four active mosques in Moscow: Cathedral Mosque on Olympic Prospect, Historic Mosque on Bolshoi Tatar Lane, Memorial Mosque on Poklonnaia gora, and "Little Jerusalem Mosque" in Otradny. According to figures from 2009, there are 836 Orthodox churches and chapels in Moscow.

"The rich practice of the construction of Orthodox churches in countries where non-Orthodox confessions predominate, and also of Islam and Buddhism, shows that conflict situations can be avoided if there is agreement on the place of construction and size of the building and its architectural characteristics with all interested parties, including local residents," the director of the synodal Department for Relations of Church and Society, Archpriest Vsevolod Chaplin, is convinced. "In contemporary Russia, mosques are often built or occupied by persons who are under the influence of foreign extremist centers, and the leaders of traditional Muslims themselves say this openly." Therefore, in his opinion, Orthodox people should have guarantees that such situations will not be repeated and this also can be a subject of dialogue with local authorities and Muslim communities.

However, the Council of Muftis is not inclined to dramatize the situation. "We now need new mosques and local authorities agree with this," the press secretary of the Council of Muftis of Russia, Gulnur Gazeeva, told Kommersant. "The interests of believers should be protected." She said that a mosque is needed in Tekstilshchiki because many Muslims reside there. "Protests of the local residents are understandable; they are frightened by the activity of Muslims and they fear the television image of the Muslim terrorist without seeing the true face of Islam. The authorities are to blame for this," Roman Lunkin, director of the Institute of Religion and Law, thinks. "However, the authorities should take into consideration that Moscow is a multiconfessional city and therefore a mosque will be built anyway."

Police conduct raid in Moscow Muslim prayer house

Islamnews.ru (17.09.2010) / HRWF (23.09.2010) - <http://www.hrwf.net> - On Friday officers of Moscow police conducted a raid in the prayer building on Ugreshsk Street where Muslims are forced to perform their prayers because there is no mosque.

The territory and building, known among Muscovite Muslims as the "mosque on Dubrovka," was ringed by police cordons.

"Immediately after the ending of Friday prayers (jumuah namaz) policemen and persons in civilian clothes entered the premises. Police cars and busses surrounded the territory and an inspection of documents was begun, IA IslamNews was told by one of the parishioners.

According to eyewitnesses, parishioners were divided into two groups—Muscovites and guests of the capital. The documents of the former were inspected at the gates at the entrance to the territory of the prayer house, and the out-of-towners were taken to a van for a more thorough investigation of their identity.

The persons conducting the inspection did not wish to identify themselves and produce documents. The only identification mark was one sign of the "Pechatniki" department of internal affairs of the Southeast Administrative District of Moscow on one of the police cars.

One of the officers in civilian clothing said that the police were conducting a "complex investigation" upon a tip from the local population. "We work closely with local residents and we received a tip from them that something was going on here," he explained.

Meanwhile, the premises occupied by a religious organization are located in an industrial zone where there is not a single residence.(tr. by PDS, posted 21 September 2010)

Jehovah's Witness leader faces 2 years in prison for "extremist" literature

Portal-credo.ru (16.09.2010) - HRWF (17.09.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - On 9 September a criminal indictment was served on Alexander Kalistratov, chairman of the "Gorno-altaisk" local religious organization of Jehovah's Witnesses, the press service of the Administrative Center of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia reports.

This indictment was the direct consequence of the decision in a civil case finding 18 religious publications of Jehovah's Witnesses to be "extremist materials." Having exhausted all Russian means of legal defense, Kalistratov filed an appeal in the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR). Meanwhile a criminal case on article 282 of the Criminal Code of RF (incitement of hatred) was initiated against him that threatens imprisonment for two years.

Originally the case against the Jehovah's Witnesses was initiated by Assistant Prosecutor Vladimir Bedarev. On 12 January 2009 an employee of a transport company that had received packages containing current issues of the "Watchtower" and "Awake" magazines requested from Kalistratov a copy of each issue, and the next day he delivered them to Bedarev. This became the basis for a criminal investigation. A year later a Gorno-Altaisk court found one of these magazines extremist for the sentence "Although [King of ancient Judah] Josiah was a boy, he already understood that it was necessary to have fellowship with those who serve Jehovah." On the basis of this sentence, the expert L. Araeva came to the following conclusion: "Saying 'it is necessary to have fellowship with those' in the text presupposes that at the same time 'it is not necessary to have fellowship with others.' This consists of implicit propaganda of enmity on the basis of religious affiliation."

We recall that in their time specialists in the Russian Federal Center of Judicial Expert Analysis in the Russian Ministry of Justice expressed themselves in the following way: "Expert linguist L.A. Areva has improperly used the concepts of associative stimulus and associative sequence. . . . The expert has confused the concepts and reached unfounded generalizations."

Here is how Attorney Viktor Zhenkov commented on the issue of the indictment: "It is surprising that the prosecutor needed only three working days for this since the magnitude of the case comprises 13 volumes. In such a short period of time it is impossible to analyze such an abundance of material. Prosecutor Vdobavok of the Altai republic refused to review 9 appeals by the attorney against the illegal decisions of the investigator. The hope remains that the court will approach this case in a more reasonable manner." (tr. by PDS, posted 17 September 2010)

Russians protest building of mosque

Archpriest Dimitry Smirnov warns that Russia may become a Muslim country and invites Muslims to pray in Orthodox churches

Portal-credo.ru (15.09.2010) - HRWF (17.09.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - The head of the synodal Department of RPTsMP for Relations with Armed Forces and Law Enforcement Institutions, Archpriest Dimitry Smirnov, does not see any threat in the idea that Muslims may begin going to Orthodox churches because of the shortage of mosques,

about which the head imam of Moscow's main mosque, Ildar Aliautdinov, warned, and he even welcomes this idea.

"There's no threat; we are very happy, if you please. The doors of churches are open; come and pray on your own. Perhaps one of them will become interested in Christianity," Fr Dimitry is quoted by Interfax-Religiia.

The priest recalled that Muslims honor Jesus Christ as a prophet and he said they often drop into his church. "They are interested, and we always receive them with an open heart." "Some come simply to get help from the spirit. And many Muslims here join in constructing new churches and Sunday schools, and in restoration. Our brother Uzbek or Tajik helps out and we are very grateful," Fr Dimitry assessed the works of his helpers.

Fr Dimitry warned that given the current decline in the birthrate, Russia may become a Muslim country some time. (tr. by PDS, posted 16 September 2010)

Woes of Jehovah's Witnesses prolonged by Russian officials

Russian Federation challenges decision of European Court regarding restoration of rights of Moscow congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses

Portal-credo.ru (15.09.2010) - HRWF (17.09.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - On 9 September the Russian federation officially appealed the unanimous resolution of the European Court of Human Rights which found the liquidation and prohibition of the activity of the "Religious society of Jehovah's Witnesses in the city of Moscow" to be illegal. As the Press Service of the Administrative Center of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia told "Portal-credo.ru," the Russian side requested that the case be transferred to the Grand Chamber of the European Court.

In the resolution of 10 June 2010 that is being appealed, which was published on our portal, Russia was required "to fulfill its legal obligation . . . in order to put an end to the violation as defined by the European Court, and to eliminate its consequences in such a way as to restore, to the extent possible, the situation as it existed before the violation."

The judges of the European Court reached the unanimous opinion that the liquidation and prohibition of the activity of the congregation was a clear violation of fundamental human rights guaranteed by the European Convention, including the right to freedom of religion and peaceful associations. The resolution entailed the removal by Russia of the ban and a restoration of the status of the Jehovah's Witnesses' congregation as a registered religious association. However, the application for a review of the case by the Grand Chamber extended this process and enabled a further expansion of religious intolerance against the Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia.

The ban on the activity of the Moscow congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses, that was established by a decision of the Moscow city court of 16 June 2004, has been systematically used by bureaucrats at various levels for justifying the campaign of hostility aiming for a complete prohibition of this religion in Russia. On 8 December 2009 the Supreme Court of RF issued a decision regarding the literature of Jehovah's Witnesses. It resulted in a surge of intolerance toward believers of this religion, manifested in arson of houses of worship,

beatings, and illegal detentions. The wave of such actions conducted with the participation or toleration of officials in Russia has not subsided. (tr. by PDS, posted 16 September 2010)

Mormons may teach English

Tver court ends case of Mormons whom Ministry of Justice forbade to conduct classes in English

Portal-credo.ru (14.09.2010) - HRWF (17.09.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - On 10 September there was a session in the municipal court of the central region of Tver, during which petitions were reviewed from representatives of the local religious organization of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), who had requested the termination of an administrative case initiated at the request of the Ministry of Justice, the "SOVA" information and analysis center reports.

We recall that in May 2010 the provincial administration of the Ministry of Justice forbade Mormons to conduct classes in the English language and issued a warning to the leadership of the organization about the impermissibility of charitable activity not provided for in the charter.

The court found numerous procedural violations committed by the ministry and it put an end to action on the case of administrative responsibility for failure to heed the warning on an inappropriate subject. (tr. by PDS, posted 16 September 2010)

Residents of Moscow Tekstilshchiki Region, supported by ultra-right organizations, collect signatures against mosque construction

Portal-credo.ru (13.09.2010) - HRWF (17.09.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Around 1,000 signatures against construction of a mosque in Moscow's Tekstilshchiki region have been collected by organizers of an action that occurred on 11 September on Volzhskii Boulevard.

As organizers of the event told an "Interfax-Religiia" correspondent, the majority of its participants were people of middle age and youth, around 500 persons in all.

Residents of the region are concerned that the mosque will make parking difficult and also they foresee a negative attitude of the future parishioners toward dogs, which are considered as unclean animals in Islam.

According to participants in the action, authorities had earlier denied permission for building an Orthodox chapel here, explaining their refusal by the absence of utilities under this lot.

Yet another argument of opponents of construction of the mosque on Volzhskii Boulevard is that there are plans to make it a single green zone.

"We hope that officials will learn and heed the opinion of local residents when they make a decision whether to have a mosque with a madrasah or a wonderful park for general

recreation. Up to now their opinion has not been considered at all," a statement of the event's organizers said on the day before it happened.

As the "SOVA" information and analysis center reported, the action was organized by the "My Yard" movement that is completely controlled by ultra-rightist activists. The information campaign regarding the action included the participation of RONS [Russian National Union] and DPHI [Movement against Illegal Immigration]. Participants also included Kirill Frolov, ultra-right activists, and the Russian National Bolshevik Front. According to eyewitnesses, some of the ultra-rightist activists were arrested by police at the end of the gathering. (tr. by PDS, posted 17 September 2010)

Surgut "extremist" case

By a Russian lawyer under cover of anonymity

HRWF (11.09.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - On 26 March, 2010, the Surgut City Court of Khanty-Mansi rendered a decision finding that 29 Scientology religious books, lectures and brochures should be labeled as "extremist" under the Extremism Law. This decision occurred after an ex parte hearing that did not include any party on behalf of Scientology. No Church of Scientology or Scientologists who were the intended recipients of the books and lectures were allowed to intervene as a party to attend the hearing. Indeed, they were not even given notice of the hearing. The American publisher of the materials that were seized, Bridge Publications, was also denied the right to intervene.

One of the intended recipients of the Scriptures, Anna Pordnova, a founder of the Church of Scientology of Surgut, received a copy of the decision from the Surgut City Court, but only after the 26 March decision was rendered. Ms. Pordnova received the decision in the mail on 6 May 2010 and promptly filed a notice of appeal within 10 days of receipt of the decision on 13 May (the other parties that were not granted intervention below also refiled notices of appeal at this time). However, as the filing of this notice of appeal was out of time and as Ms. Pordnova was never granted the right to intervene in the case, Ms. Pordnova filed further complaints in the Surgut City Court to intervene in the case, to gain access to the case file and to file a timely appeal.

On 24 May 2010, a different Judge in the Surgut City Court held a hearing regarding Ms. Pordnova's claims. The Court determined that:

- 1) Ms. Portnova could intervene in the case;
- 2) Ms. Portnova could obtain access to the case file; and
- 3) Ms. Pordnova could file an appeal from the 26 March ruling declaring the materials extremist even though the 10 days for filing an appeal had run. The Court "recovered" Ms. Pordnova's time for filing an appeal as she was not provided notice of the 26 March ruling at the time it was rendered. It ruled that she had ten days from 24 May to do so.

On 13 July 2010, the Khanty Mansiysk Court of Appeals heard the complaints of all applicants that had filed appeals to enter into the Surgut extremist case but were refused the right to intervene or file an appeal by the Surgut City Court.

Three founding members of the religious group in Surgut who were intended recipients of the seized materials were heard by the Appeals Court. The Court rendered an oral decision that they had a right to intervene and be heard in the case. Likewise, the Court of Appeals found that the Church of Scientology of Moscow had the right to appeal and intervene.

However, the Court determined that the Surgut Church could not intervene because it is not a legal entity (the Surgut Church was denied the right to register as a religious organization on the grounds that it did not qualify under the 15 Year Rule of the 1997 Religion Law; this was taken to Strasbourg and the European Human Rights Court found that the 15 Year Rule contravened the right to religious freedom and freedom of association under the Human Rights Convention). The Appeals Court did not grant the publisher, Bridge Publications, the right to appeal and intervene on the grounds that there was no evidence before the Appeals Court that the seized materials were published by Bridge (this is evident from the seized materials themselves, but they were not part of the record before the Court).

Placement of Scientology Scriptures on Federal List of Banned Materials

The Appeals Court determined to remand the complaints of the parishioners and the Moscow Church to the Surgut City Court. It determined that they have the right to access the case file and be heard on the merits before the City Court regarding their claims.

The 13 July 2010 decision by the Khanti-Mansiysk Appeals Court is significant as it negates the 26 March 2010 Surgut City Court ruling by remanding the case and subjecting the lower court ruling to challenge below. Based on the Court of Appeals ruling:

- 1) There is no final decision in the case; and
- 2) The current decision must be reconsidered in light of the arguments that will be presented below.

Nevertheless, approximately 3 hours after the Appeals Court decision, the seized books and lectures were placed on the federal list of banned materials by the Federal Ministry of Justice (MOJ) and showed up as Items 632-660 on the MOJ website. This inclusion on the list of banned materials directly contradicts letters from the MOJ 3 weeks ago to the Moscow Church and Church counsel where MOJ officials noted that they were aware that 1) appeals had been filed; 2) the decision is not final; and 3) they will not put the seized items on the federal list of banned materials on the MOJ website.

In response to this draconian measure, officials of the Church of Scientology of Moscow sent a telegram and an e-mail to the Ministry of Justice alerting them to the Appeals Court decision and demanding that the Ministry immediately remove this material from their list. Counsel for the Church met with officials in the Ministry on 15 July 2010 to protest the inclusion of the Scriptures on the website on 15 July as there is no final decision in the Surgut case. Despite the fact that the case has been remanded to the trial court for further hearings, these officials refused to remove the Scientology Scriptures from the list, evidencing the level of bias against Scientology by the MOJ.

As the Ministry has improperly and illegally placed these Scriptures on its federal list of banned materials, the Church has filed a suit against the Ministry of Justice challenging the placement of the materials on the banned list.

Placement of these Scriptures on the list of banned materials means that these Scriptures, which form the basic foundation of Scientology religious doctrine, will be banned throughout Russia, placing all Scientology religious organizations and their parishioners at great risk of raids, liquidation actions, criminal charges and general harassment and persecution while severely suppressing the right to religious freedom for Scientologists and the Church of Scientology in Russia.

Nizhnekamsk Religious Registration

In October 2009, the European Court of Human Rights found that the refusal to register Scientology Churches in Surgut and Nizhnekamsk as religious organizations because they had not existed for 15 years as required by the 1997 Religion Law violated the rights of the applicants, in particular, violation of the provisions of Article 9 of the Convention (freedom of religion) in the light of Article 11 (freedom of association). The Court found that "the restricted status afforded to religious groups under the Religion Act did not allow members of such a group to enjoy effectively their right to freedom of religion, rendering such a right illusory and theoretical rather than practical and effective, as required by the Convention". The two organizations were awarded 20,000 € in costs and damages.

This ruling became final on 1 March 2010. Rather than registering the Surgut Church as a religious organization as required by the Human Rights Court, the Russian government has instead manufactured an assault on the Surgut religious association and its founders by seizing all the basic Scientology Scriptures sent to them and declaring these Scriptures as "extremist" in the secret, ex parte hearing held 25 days after the ruling of the Human Rights Court became final and binding on the Russian Federation.

On 15 July 2010, the Tatarstan Supreme Court ordered that, in light of the October 2009 ruling of the European Human Rights Court in the Nizhnekamsk Case, the local Ministry of Justice must register the Church of Scientology of Nizhnekamsk as a religious organization under the 1997 Religion Law.

Jehovah's Witnesses rebuffed by high court

Russian Supreme Court fails to satisfy appeal of German publisher challenging decision finding Jehovah's Witnesses' books extremist

Portal-credo.ru (10.09.2010) - HRWF (10.09.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - On 7 September the Supreme Court of the Russian federation refused to satisfy the special appeal of the German religious publisher "Wachtturm Bibel-und Traktat-Gesellschaft der Zeugen Jehovas," challenging the decision of the Rostov provincial court that ruled 34 publications of the Jehovah's Witnesses to be extremist, the "SOVA" Information and Analysis Center reports, citing the Press Service of the Administrative Center of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia.

On 1 June 2010 the Administrative Center of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia filed in the European Court for Human Rights an appeal of this decision and of the decision of the Supreme Court of RF that confirmed it. (tr. by PDS, posted 10 September 2010)

Public access to religious website blocked in eastern Russia

JW Official Website (09.09.2010) / HRWF (14.09.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - On September 9, 2010, the Russian government officially challenged the judgment by the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) that unanimously struck down the ban on Jehovah's Witnesses in Moscow. If Russia is successful with its request for referral to the Court's Grand Chamber, Russia's compliance with the judgment will be delayed, adding fuel to an already heated environment of religious intolerance.

On the other hand, one of the largest Internet service providers in eastern Russia, Technodesign, was compelled by court order to block access to several popular Web sites, including <http://www.watchtower.org>, the official Web site of Jehovah's Witnesses.

The ruling was made by the Tsentralniy District Court of Komsomolsk-on-Amur on June 4, 2010, and came into force on June 16, 2010. The Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania (owner of the copyrighted materials on the Web site) and the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc. (owner of the Internet site itself) were not called to participate in the case, nor did they receive a copy of the decision. Both corporations first learned of the decision on August 4, 2010, after Technodesign had already blocked access to the Internet site on July 30, 2010, in implementation of the court decision.

Once the decision was implemented, users in the area were unable to access [watchtower.org](http://www.watchtower.org). It appears that local officials want to prevent interested individuals from reading online any of the publications that the courts in Rostov and Gorno-Altaysk had pronounced extremist.

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Witch-hunt against 265 religious and faith-based organizations

On 9 September 2010, Russia Religion News (Stetson University) posted the translation of an article in Russian which described the plan put in place to eradicate non-Orthodox faiths and institutions in Russia.

Portal-credo.ru (08.09.2010) / HRWF (07.09.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - On 18 August, the Department of Culture and Art of the city of Niagana, Khanti-Mansiisk autonomous region, sent a letter from the first deputy director of the Department of Labor and Social Security of the population of KhMAO, I. Uvarov, to directors of institutions that they were required to obey, the "SOVA" information and analysis center reports.

The letter says that on the territory of the Russian federation recently "destructive totalitarian sects and groups, whose activity causes irreparable harm to society and the

individual," have become widespread. In connection with this, the Department of Labor and Social Security had prepared materials "for combating totalitarian sects when members of such sects attend social and cultural institutions."

In particular, it is proposed:

- to create checkpoints in municipal social and cultural institutions (for example, movie theatres and recreational centers);
- to create volunteer "law-enforcement" militia in educational institutions;

-to exercise control for refusal to provide facilities to representatives of "totalitarian sects" for conducting various events.

In addition, it is planned to conduct campaigns in news media and explanatory work in various institutions and to register in medical institutions cases of refusal of medical treatment "on the basis of sectarian motivation" and the like.

Two lists were attached to the letter: a list of organizations recognized as extremist in RF and a list "of the most well known destructive totalitarian sects and groups that have a substantial number of indicators of such, active in the Russian federation." The latter list contains 265 organizations, including #56 "Herbalife," #61.16 "Word of Life," #210 "Scepter," and #249 "Amway."

It should be noted that the "Word of Life" church was registered by the Ministry of Justice of RF and is regularly audited. (tr. by PDS, posted 9 September 2010)

Congresses disrupted, website blocked

By Geraldine Fagan, and Felix Corley

AJW (07.09.2010) / HRWF (08.09.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Disruption of a regional Jehovah's Witness congress in southern Russia in late July – including by two dustcarts – did not involve extremism allegations. But disruption of similar congresses in August was based on counterterrorism police accusations that extremist literature might be distributed, Jehovah's Witness spokesperson Grigory Martynov told Forum 18 News Service. Meanwhile, for the first time in Russia, a court in the far eastern town of Komsomolsk-on-Amur has ordered a local internet service provider to block access to the international Jehovah's Witness website www.watchtower.org in addition to popular websites like YouTube. The court found that magazines posted in Russian on the Jehovah's Witness site "are directed at violating the integrity of the Russian Federation" and "incite social, racial and religious discord", according to the verdict seen by Forum 18.

A nationwide state campaign directed against Jehovah's Witnesses began in early 2009. The campaign intensified from 8 December 2009, when the Supreme Court upheld Rostov-on-Don Regional Court's earlier ruling outlawing 34 Jehovah's Witness titles as extremist and dissolving the local Jehovah's Witness religious organisation in Taganrog.

Three criminal cases have already been opened against individual Jehovah's Witnesses in connection with alleged extremist activity, accusations Jehovah's Witnesses vigorously deny.

Similarly the target of a nationwide campaign are readers of the works of the Turkish Muslim theologian Said Nursi, many of whose works have also been placed on the Federal List of Extremist Materials.

The List, which runs to 694 titles as of 7 September 2010, contains items whose preparation, distribution or storage with the intent of distribution is banned across Russia.

On 18 August, Ilham Islamli became the first Nursi reader in Russia to be convicted under the Criminal Code and punished under extremism-related charges when Nizhny Novgorod District Court sentenced him to ten months' detention, suspended for one year. He has chosen not to appeal against the sentence. Another Nursi reader in Dagestan, Ziyautdin Dapayev, faces a continuing criminal investigation.

Police cars, dustcarts, electricity cut

Arriving for the three-day event at their Kingdom Hall in Nezlobnaya (Stavropol Region) on the morning of 23 July, some 2,000 Jehovah's Witnesses found police cars blocking entry to the building. Although the Hall had hosted a number of similarly large services in previous weeks, according to the Jehovah's Witnesses, the police attributed their action to the "criminal situation" in the North Caucasus republics from where many of the Witnesses had come.

After some five hours standing outside, they were permitted to enter the Kingdom Hall and begin worship, but local district vice-chair Svetlana Zhurakovskaya soon mounted the pastors' podium and demanded the microphone in order to interrupt the service. Electricity to the building was then shut off, but the event continued thanks to an extra generator.

The following morning, some 200 Jehovah's Witnesses managed to enter the Kingdom Hall at approximately 6am, but entry was then blocked by two dustcarts, of which Forum 18 has seen a photograph. The building was later cordoned off by police, who found a bag with wires hanging out of it some distance beyond the perimeter fence while searching the site with dogs. As the premises were then evacuated, the Jehovah's Witnesses were finally forced to return to their hometowns at around 10am.

A 22 July order issued by Nezlobnaya village council, seen by Forum 18, bans all mass events in the village - including "religious congresses and conferences" - until 1 October 2010 due to a heightened risk of terrorism.

While terrorist attacks in Stavropol Region - bordering the restive North Caucasus - are rare, a car bomb did injure some 20 people in Pyatigorsk, close to Nezlobnaya, on 17 August. The terrorist threat may well be a pretext for the state's action, however, as Jehovah's Witnesses in the area have previously been singled out for restrictions.

History of congress obstruction

In nearby Nevinnomyssk, the municipal administration issued an order on 17 July 2009, seen by Forum 18, specifically banning worship services by Jehovah's Witnesses in the town on particular dates in July and August of that year. Going ahead with their 18-19 July congress anyway, the Jehovah's Witnesses managed to outwit police attempts to block entry to their Kingdom Hall by arriving before 6am on the first day and at 11am on the next.

The July 2010 Nevinnomyssk congress also went ahead, but traffic police detained three minibuses of Jehovah's Witnesses travelling to it, seeking extremist literature.

By 2004, Jehovah's Witnesses in southern Russia were restricted to holding congresses on their own property – such as Nezlobnaya Kingdom Hall – having been barred from public premises, particularly under pressure from local Cossacks.

August congress disruptions

Disruption of this year's Jehovah's Witness congresses continued in mid-August, with events blocked in Bratsk and Tula, and disrupted in Irkutsk. "Everywhere the pattern's the same," Martynov of the Jehovah's Witnesses remarked to Forum 18. "The police seal the building saying they're looking for a suspicious item. When nothing is found, it doesn't matter – the main point is to disrupt the congress."

In Bratsk, Tula and elsewhere, counterextremism police have told local Jehovah's Witnesses informally that they were blocking the congresses because they had information that "extremist" literature would be distributed at them, Martynov told Forum 18.

Jehovah's Witness summer congresses have routinely faced disruption in previous years, from 2008 on a mass scale.

Official who banned Baptist meetings rebuked

The Sosnovka District Prosecutor's Office in Tambov Region has rebuked the head of the Sosnovka village administration, Valery Toporkov, for illegally banning Baptist evangelistic concerts, according to a 9 August letter from Acting Prosecutor Svetlana Cheprasova, seen by Forum 18. She said he had failed to respond within the deadline for such notifications and that the administration "exceeded its powers" as it did not have the right to ban public events, merely to require changes in the way they are organised.

The Baptists notified the administration of the proposed outdoor concerts on 30 June in accordance with the law, but on 2 July Toporkov issued a written refusal. Despite negotiation with administration officials, Toporkov and other officials refused to change the decision and allow the concerts to go ahead. Police stood by on 9 July as a group of local people attacked the Baptists and drove them from the village.

Pastor Vadim Mikhailin of Truth Baptist Church in Tambov welcomed the Prosecutor's Office rebuke to Toporkov, telling Forum 18 on 13 August that the decision recognised that the administration head had broken the law by banning their concerts.

First Russian blocking of Jehovah's Witness website

On 30 July, the internet service provider Technodesign in Komsomolsk-na-Amure blocked its customers' access to the official Jehovah's Witness international website www.watchtower.org, which contains information and publications in English, Russian and many other languages, according to an announcement on its website td-net.ru. Also blocked were four other sites, including a far-right website.

The company was following the requirements of a 4 June ruling by Judge Yelena Buzynovskaya of Komsomolsk's Central District Court which came into force on 16 July. The decision was in response to a suit by the town prosecutor, Vitaly Pakhomov, to have access to the Jehovah's Witness site and the far-right site blocked as containing "extremist

materials", according to the court website and court documents seen by Forum 18. The prosecutor noted that an investigation revealed that two Jehovah's Witness magazines "Watchtower" and "Awake!", of which some issues have been placed on the Federal List, appear on the site.

The court found that the presence on the far-right website of Hitler's "Mein Kampf", as well as the issues of the Jehovah's Witness magazines on the Watchtower site, "are directed at violating the integrity of the Russian Federation, undermine state security, incite social, racial and religious discord, provokes animosity towards the way of life and culture of citizens of Russian ethnicity, undermine the foundations of national security of the Russian Federation, and violate the constitutional rights of citizens".

Most elements in this accusation are or closely resemble phrases from the 2002 Extremism Law. However, "provokes animosity towards the way of life and culture of citizens of Russian ethnicity" appears to originate with the suit brought by Ingushetia Republic Public Prosecutor's Office to block the Ingushetiya.ru political opposition website in 2008. The phrase was also used by the city court of Nyagan (Khanty-Mansiisk Autonomous Okrug) in a ruling blocking access to several websites on the Federal List, the court's website reported on 12 March 2010.

On 30 August, Technodesign lodged an appeal against the 4 June ruling ordering it to block the Jehovah's Witness site, the Central District Court told Forum 18 on 7 September. The appeal will be heard in Khabarovsk Regional Court.

Jehovah's Witnesses complained to Forum 18 on 6 September that neither of the two US entities which publish their works and run their website were notified of the court proceedings, nor were they given a copy of the court decision. "This is the first time we have suffered such a block on any of our sites in Russia," they added.

Four days after the block was ordered on the Jehovah's Witness site, the same court issued another ruling ordering the company to block five other sites, including YouTube and Zhurnal.ru, which also contained works deemed extremist by Russian courts. Similar rulings were issued against two other providers soon afterwards in the wake of similar suits by prosecutor Pakhomov. Forum 18 was unable to reach Pakhomov on 6 and 7 September.

A document apparently from Khabarovsk Regional Prosecutor's Office, published on the priamurka.ru website on 1 September, indicates that it has been working together with the Regional Police and Roskomnadzor to study the extent of the availability of "extremist materials" – including Jehovah's Witness texts and "Mein Kampf" – on websites accessible locally. It asked local prosecutors in four locations – including Komsomolsk-na-Amure – to find out if local people can access these sites, discovering that seven internet service providers offered such access. The document said 21 suits against internet service providers had been lodged in the region to block such access.

Valentina Glazova, spokesperson for Khabarovsk Regional Prosecutor's Office, believed that the suit against Technodesign was one of three against local providers specifically related to the Watchtower site. Asked if further such suits could be expected, she declined to speculate. "Our response is still being formed," she told Forum 18 on 7 September.

Glazova denied that these suits represented censorship. "Our office supervises the implementation of the law," she insisted. "Access to extremist material on websites should be blocked." She said her Office had received an instruction to conduct the survey of local

internet access, but declined to say who had issued the instruction and whether it came from Moscow.

No appeal so far on Strasbourg ruling

On 10 September the 10 June 2010 ruling by the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) in Strasbourg in favour of the Jehovah's Witnesses of Moscow becomes final, unless either side appeals. The ruling states that the 2004 ban on the Moscow Jehovah's Witness community was unlawful.

So far, neither of the parties has appealed, the ECtHR Press Unit told Forum 18 on 7 September.

Jehovah's Witnesses appeal to Supreme Court

Russian Supreme Court to review appeal of foreign organization whose rights were grossly violated

AJW (03.09.2010) / HRWF (07.09.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - On 7 September the Supreme Court of the Russian federation will hold a hearing on a special appeal submitted by the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of Jehovah's Witnesses in Germany on the determination of a Rostov regional court regarding refusal to accept an appeal of said foreign legal entity. We recall that on 11 September 2009 a Rostov provincial court (E.V. Shikulia, presiding judge) issued a baseless decision finding 34 Christian publications extremist, which had been published by said society without even informing the foreign organization of the conduct of the hearing and having reviewed the case in the absence of its representatives.

Horst Henshel, a member of the council of directors of the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of Jehovah's Witnesses in Germany, expressed dismay regarding such a decision: "The investigation of the case was conducted without our participation, although the court did have the possibility of informing us inasmuch as every publication contains information about the publisher. Our rights were grossly violated by the decision of 11 September 2010, since our society's reputation as a publisher was damaged and the Russian authorities refused us permission to import our publications which we have published for Russia for several decades now. We appealed this decision in the Supreme Court and we hope that Russia will confirm in practice its desire to observe the norms of international law."

A.S. Omelchenko, a kandidat of juridical science, commented on this situation thus: "Dismay is evoked by the tendency developing in Russia to satisfy lawsuits finding journals extremist without the participation of the publisher. By preventing the publisher of the publications to defend its right, the Rostov provincial court committed a substantive mistake. Such a violation evidences the discriminatory approach that, in accordance with article 14 of the Convention on the Protection of Human Rights and Basic Freedoms, is impermissible."

In the opinion of Horst Henshel and representatives of other foreign organizations, the upcoming hearing in the Supreme Court of RF will have fundamental significance not only for the legal entities of the Jehovah's Witnesses, but also for other foreign organizations that conduct their activity in Russia.

The review of the appeal in the Supreme Court will be held on 7 September 2010 at 10.30 at the address: Room 5038, 15 Povarskaia St., Moscow. (tr. by PDS, posted 3 September 2010)

Scientology materials declared extremist

Ministry of justice seeks closing of Hubbard College in Nizhny Novgorod province

Interfax-Religiia (01.09.2010) / HRWF (07.09.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - The chief administration of the Russian Ministry of Justice for Nizhny Novgorod province sent to court in August a lawsuit for termination of the activity of seven noncommercial organizations. The press service of the administration reports that this list includes the Nizhegorod Hubbard College of Management. The basis for filing the suit consisted mainly of the claim that these organizations had not submitted accounts of their activities to the Ministry of Justice or the leaders themselves had requested ceasing the activity of the organizations headed by them.

In particular, according to information from the administration, Hubbard College had not presented accounts to the Ministry of Justice for three years.

"In July of this year we checked all of their active addresses and we did not find employees of the organization in any one of them. Since in the course of three years employees of the institution have not presented to us an account of their activity, this becomes a basis for filing in court a suit for termination of the activity of said organization," the administration stated.

Previously it was reported that in April of this year, by decision of the Surgut city court, informational materials by Ron Hubbard, including "Factors. Praise and Regeneration of Existence" (lectures 1 to 18), "Congress of Association. Communication, Freedom, and Capacity" (lectures 1 to 16), and others were found to be extremist. In accordance with legislative requirements, they will be included in the federal list of extremist materials and their distribution on the territory of RF will be forbidden. (tr. by PDS, posted 2 August 2010)

Mormons prevented from teaching English

Same-old, same-old

ReligioPolis (01.09.2010) / HRWF (07.09.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - In accordance with a request from the administration of the Ministry of Justice for Tver province, classes in the English language, which have been conducted by the local church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) religious organization, have been stopped.

A warning regarding the impermissibility of the classes as a charitable activity was received by the administration of the religious organization back in May 2010. The believers were accused of violation of the federal law "On noncommercial organizations" for conducting activity "not provided for by the founding document and not according with the charter goals."

Law-abiding Mormons immediately ceased conducting the charitable classes for those desiring them, despite the fact that such a practice is articulated in the charter of the local organization of the church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. A religious organization and the legal system of RF had already tangled in a similar situation on Sakhalin, where after the illegal actions of local power agencies legality was restored by a court of the city of Yuzho-Sakhalinsk. Thus, the long months of depriving the many who desire the possibility of improving their skills in the study of a foreign language can be explained only by the subsequent unfortunate months of heat and natural disasters.

At the present time the religious organization has sent to the administration of justice a suggestion for reviewing its conclusions and they are waiting for the scheduling of a court session. The ReligioPolis correspondent in Tver will report further development of events. (tr. by PDS, posted 3 September 2010)

First criminal charges against Jehovah's Witnesses, Nursi reader sentenced

Geraldine Fagan and Felix Corley

Forum 18 (26.08.2010) / HRWF (31.08.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - A criminal extremism case against Maksim Kalinin, a Jehovah's Witness elder in the Volga republic of Mari El, rests on FSB security police surveillance "using a hidden camera in his home without his knowledge", Forum 18 News Service has learnt. "This means that at the current moment all 160,000 Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia cannot feel secure even in their own homes," Jehovah's Witness spokesperson Grigory Martynov remarked to Forum 18 on 20 August.

Kalinin's is one of the first three criminal cases to be opened against individual Jehovah's Witnesses in connection with alleged extremist activity. If convicted under Criminal Code Article 282.2 ("organisation of activity by an extremist organisation"), he could face up to three years in prison.

The criminal cases against Jehovah's Witnesses come as the first criminal trial in Russia of a reader of the works of the late Muslim theologian Said Nursi under extremism-related charges ended in a conviction and a suspended sentence, Forum 18 notes. Another criminal case continues.

The Mari El developments are part of an ongoing nationwide state campaign directed against Jehovah's Witnesses. Begun in early 2009, the campaign intensified from 8 December 2009, when the Supreme Court upheld Rostov-on-Don Regional Court's earlier ruling outlawing 34 Jehovah's Witness titles as extremist and dissolving the local Jehovah's Witness religious organisation in Taganrog.

Similarly added to the Federal List of Extremist Materials, Russian translations of Nursi's "Risale-i Nur" ("Messages of Light") multi-part Koranic commentary were outlawed by Moscow's Koptevo District Court in May 2007. Nurdzhular - which Nursi readers insist does not exist - was then banned as an extremist organisation by Russia's Supreme Court in April 2008.

Officials in various government agencies have refused to explain who initiated the campaigns against Jehovah's Witnesses and readers of Said Nursi's works.

Martynov estimates that, in the wake of the Supreme Court ruling, law enforcement agents' searches, brief detentions and similar incidents involving Jehovah's Witnesses across Russia now total around 300.

First Nursi criminal conviction

On 18 August, Ilham Islamli became the first Nursi reader in Russia to be convicted under the Criminal Code and punished under extremism-related charges when Nizhny Novgorod District Court found him guilty of violating Article 282, Part 1 ("hatred or enmity, as well as the humiliation of human dignity"). Judge Nikolai Novichikhin sentenced him to ten months' detention, suspended for one year, the court website stated. During this period, he will have to remain on record with the authorities and will not be able to change his place of residence without notifying them. The sentence took into account that he had been detained since his arrest on 18 June.

Islamli was freed in the courtroom after the verdict was announced, as he confirmed to Forum 18 on 22 August.

Islamli, a 34-year-old Azerbaijani citizen long resident in Russia, was accused of inciting religious hatred for posting Nursi's works in Russian on a website he ran until early 2009. His arrest in Moscow Region was organised by the Nizhny Novgorod Regional FSB.

Asked in July who he believed might have suffered from Islamli's posting of some works by Nursi on his website, the investigator in the case, Vladimir Chernobrovin, responded to Forum 18: "Asking who suffered or not is not relevant. The investigation is based on the court decisions banning Nursi's works."

Secret camera

Following 10 August raids on private homes and a Jehovah's Witness worship service – at which he was present – Maksim Kalinin was formally declared a suspect in a case opened against him under Criminal Code Article 282.2 ("organisation of activity by an extremist organisation") by Anton Vitsyuk, an investigator at Mari El Republic Public Prosecutor's Office. While Kalinin was initially obliged to pledge not to leave the republican capital Yoshkar-Ola, this condition was lifted after ten days when no charges were brought against him, Martynov told Forum 18 on 23 August. Kalinin continues to be a suspect, however, and must remain available for questioning.

Despite the bans on literature and two local congregations in Moscow and Taganrog (Rostov-on-Don Region), the Russian Jehovah's Witness organisation has not in fact been declared extremist, Forum 18 notes.

As a suspect rather than a witness, Kalinin exercised his right to demand materials related to his case. Among these, according to Martynov, a 30 March 2010 document issued by the Supreme Court of Mari El Republic contained information on FSB surveillance using a secret video camera in Kalinin's home, as well as their tapping of telephone calls made by seven other Jehovah's Witnesses. As the case continues, the Jehovah's Witnesses are unable to publish the contents of this document.

Evening raids

On 10 August, soon after early evening worship attended by 90 Jehovah's Witnesses – including Kalinin – began at a congregation member's private house in Yoshkar-Ola, some 30

law enforcement agents – including FSB and Special Forces [Spetsnaz] - arrived. According to the Jehovah's Witnesses, one mounted the pastors' podium and interrupted the service. All present were then searched; some had personal items - including mobile phones – confiscated, others were issued summonses for questioning. No one was permitted to leave the building until 7am; when one woman felt ill, an ambulance was called but the law enforcement agents refused to allow paramedics to enter. At five believers' homes in Yoshkar-Ola, literature was seized during similar raids lasting until 4am that night.

The Jehovah's Witnesses attribute this action to a separate criminal case opened against unspecified members of the Yoshkar-Ola congregation. In a 6 August order seen by Forum 18, Anton Vitsyuk opens the case under Article 282, Part 1 of the Criminal Code ("hatred or enmity, as well as the humiliation of human dignity") due to public activity by unnamed representatives of the local Jehovah's Witness organisation in Yoshkar-Ola "aimed at belittling the dignity of a group of persons due to their attitude towards religion".

Information confirming this "crime" was received from the republican FSB and counterextremism police departments on 2 August, the order notes. Specifically, it alleges that in 2010 the Jehovah's Witnesses distributed banned extremist literature and preached publicly "on the exclusivity and superiority of adherents of the Jehovah's Witness religious association over representatives of other Christian religions."

Reached at the Public Prosecutor's Office on 26 August, Vitsyuk confirmed that he had opened a criminal case against the Yoshkar-Ola Jehovah's Witness community under Article 282, Part 1. However, he refused to comment further, directing Forum 18 to information about the case on the website of the Investigation Department of Mari El Republic Public Prosecutor's Office. Asked to confirm whether information about Maksim Kalinin's separate case was also on the website, Vitsyuk insisted he was not authorised to give information, and added that he was on holiday.

A 12 August news item on the Investigation Department website repeats details of the 6 August order. It also states that brochures confiscated from the Jehovah's Witnesses will be "subject to careful analysis and expert investigation" and that "operative measures and investigatory action" are currently being taken "to ascertain all circumstances of the committed crime". The website does not mention Kalinin's case.

Earlier, religious extremism charges featured in the Mari El authorities' prosecution of a local adherent of traditional Mari paganism.

Gorno-Altai criminal charges

Also issued on 11 August, criminal charges under Article 282, Part 1 – seen by Forum 18 - have already been brought in a case against the leader of the local Jehovah's Witness organisation in Gorno-Altai (Altai Republic), Aleksandr Kalistratov. While not in detention, Kalistratov has signed a pledge not to travel before his trial, which may begin in September or October 2010, Martynov believes. Article 282, Part 1 carries a maximum punishment of two years' imprisonment.

Signed by Yevgeni Saidutov, an investigator with Altai Republic Public Prosecutor's Office, the charges maintain that 34-year-old Kalistratov ordered religious literature - including 13 titles banned as extremist by Gorno-Altai City Court and 30 by Rostov-on-Don Regional Court - from the Jehovah's Witnesses Russian headquarters in St Petersburg and organised its distribution by his community between October 2008 and the end of 2009. Specifically, it claims, Kalistratov visited A. Kandarakov at home in Gorno-Altai during the second half of

December 2009 and gave him two copies of "What Does God Require of Us?" while knowing it had been banned by Gorno-Altai City Court on 1 October 2009.

Forum 18 notes that the Gorno-Altai ruling had not in fact entered force by the end of 2009.

Saidutov's 18-page charges also list evidence of the literature's allegedly extremist content. While largely consisting of criticism of Jehovah's Witness Biblical commentary, they also maintain that an 8 April 1998 issue of "Awake!", banned by Gorno-Altai City Court and now on the Federal List of Extremist Materials, is extremist due to the following passage: "We attended a church in Seattle (Washington State, USA), but this was purely a formality. Religion did not occupy an important place in our lives until Jamie, a cheerful young pioneer (a full-fledged preacher of the good news) knocked at our door. She was so nice that I agreed to study the Bible. Since Fred also showed an interest, Jamie's parents led the study and a year later, in 1968, Fred and I were baptized. From the very beginning we had a sincere desire to place the interests of God's Kingdom first in our lives."

According to Saidutov's charges, "this autobiography shows that Christianity in its widespread form and servants of the church could not attract the young couple, who professed Christianity only formally. The Jehovah's Witnesses differ favourably from the Christian Church, because their doctrine aroused a sincere desire to follow it." The passage is thus seen as "aimed at inciting hatred towards the Christian (Catholic) religion and Christian (Catholic) clergy as a social group".

First criminal case against Jehovah's Witness

Charges have yet to be brought in what appears to be the first extremism case opened against an individual Jehovah's Witness in Russia, Martynov told Forum 18.

In a 21 July order seen by Forum 18, Nikolai Ivanov, an investigator with Tula Regional Public Prosecutor's Office, opens a case under Article 282, Part 1 against Jehovah's Witness Petr Babilyulka. On 30 June 2010, it alleges, Babilyulka distributed three copies of "What Does the Bible Really Teach?" – declared extremist by the Rostov-on-Don ruling – to an undetermined group of persons in a private flat in the city of Tula.

Babilyulka was imprisoned as a conscientious objector from 1956-62, according to the Jehovah's Witnesses. "What is happening reminds me of the repression of Soviet times," he remarked in their 10 August statement. "Unfortunately, 50 years on I am again having to give an explanation of my faith before the law enforcement organs."

An 85-year-old Second World War veteran who later became a Jehovah's Witness was fined 1,000 Roubles (99 Norwegian Kroner, 13 Euros, or 17 US Dollars) on 28 July for the administrative offence of "production and distribution of extremist materials" (Article 20.29 of the Administrative Violations Code).

Dagestan criminal case dropped against one Nursi reader, continues against another

Meanwhile, in Russia's North Caucasus republic of Dagestan, FSB investigators have dropped the criminal case against Nursi reader Ruslan Bulatov, the Caucasian Knot website reported on 19 August, quoting Bulatov's lawyer Murtuzali Barakayev. However, the criminal case against fellow Nursi reader Ziyautdin Dapayev continues, Barakayev added.

Prosecutors launched an investigation in December 2009 into the activity of Bulatov and Dapayev under Article 282.2, Part 2 of the Criminal Code ("participation in a banned religious extremist organisation"), which carries a maximum penalty of two years' imprisonment. The investigation began as homes associated with Nursi readers in three Dagestani towns were subjected to armed raids. Dapayev told Forum 18 in March that "of course" they read Nursi's works, but vehemently rejected any accusations of extremism or terrorism

Police block entrance to religious convention site

Familiar "bomb scare" tactic forces attendees to return home

JW Official Website (23.08.2010) / HRWF (26.08.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - "We've been waiting for this all year. Many of us took vacation and saved up money in order to come... and now there are garbage trucks blocking the entrance!"—Yuriy Savitskiy, 44.

On July 23, 2010, worshippers arriving to attend a three-day convention of Jehovah's Witnesses in the Cossack village of Nezlobniy could not even enter the convention site. The head of the village police division, Yuriy Mukhin, had blocked the main entrance with his police car. As a result, peaceful religious services could not begin and the attendees, numbering nearly 2,000, were denied access to water, restrooms, or seating areas. Although similar religious meetings were previously held successfully in the same building, local authorities claimed that their actions were due to the prevalence of criminal activity in the southern regions from where many of the attendees had traveled.

Seeing that one of the Witnesses had a video camera, an officer with the Federal Security Service (FSB) who identified himself as Sergey Viktorovich, knocked it out of his hands and broke it. The Witness was also detained for questioning.

After being forced to stand at the gate for five hours, the Witnesses were allowed to enter the convention site. But Svetlana Zhurakovskaya, Deputy Head of the Village Administration, then took over the microphone on the platform and loudly declared an order to break up the religious meeting, at which point the electricity to the building was cut off.

Early the following morning, all entrances to the convention site were blocked by foul-smelling garbage trucks and the building was cordoned off by police officers. The Witnesses were again forced to wait on the street. Then a suspicious package with protruding wires was "discovered" in the same location where a car belonging to Police Chief for Public Safety Vladimir Lipov had been parked the previous day. The police ordered everyone to evacuate the area and the convention had to be canceled. The attendees were left with little choice but to return to their homes.

Similarly, during 2009 in towns across Russia that hosted conventions of Jehovah's Witnesses, events were called off due to unannounced "fire inspections" during which the police would often "find" a "suspicious" package placed in the immediate vicinity of the convention location. The time needed to "neutralize" the package would drag on for hours and effectively result in the conventions being canceled and the attendees being sent home.

Pentecostals of Khakasiia complain about persecution

Appeal to Russian president from residents of Sayanogorsk

PDS (20.08.2010) / HRWF (26.08.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> -

To President of RF D.A. Medvedev
From citizens of RF, S.I. Vashchenko and V.V. Osmukhin

Esteemed Mister President

We are appealing to you as the guarantor of the constitution of the Russian federation. In our region (the republic of Khakasiia), in the cities of Abakan, Sayanogorsk, and Chernogorsk, rights of citizens of RF that are guaranteed to them by articles 19, 28, and 29 of the constitution of RF are being violated. The news media periodically carry propaganda that incites religious enmity toward believers of Christian evangelical churches. The words "sectarians," "zombies," "extremists," and "depressed elements prone to suicide" mold public opinion. The image of an enemy that is created gives the right to persecution of the church, as a collection of believers, on the part of local agencies of authority—the prosecutor's offices, courts, FSB, and local administrations.

As the pastor and the administrator of the "Glorification" local religious organization of the Church of Christians of Evangelical Faith (TsKhVE) of the city of Sayanogorsk, we wish to describe for you the history of our church. The "Glorification" Christian church was born in the city of Sayanogorsk in 1993 and it received state registration, certificate No. 11, of 25 February 1994. In 1997 the church joined the structure of the Russian Associated Union of Christians of Evangelical Faith (ROSKhVE), whose president at the present time is S.V. Riakovskii, a member of the Council for Cooperation with Religious Organizations in the presidential administration of RF.

The primary activity of the church in the social sphere since 1999 has been rehabilitation of drug addicts and the restoration of their social status.

The Christian church, living in accordance with the principles of the Word of God (Bible), by its own definition cannot be an antisocial element, much less an enemy of the sovereignty of the Russian federation.

Christians are called by God to pray for and to bless all authority and to be law-abiding citizens of their country. But unfortunately, on the part of local authorities over the course of the last decade the church has been subjected to uninterrupted persecution.

In 2000, a rented building was taken away from the church and for a year and a half worship services were held outdoors, since there was no possibility of renting any premises in the city for meetings.

In 2002 we acquired a residential building in which we have conducted meetings of believers in accordance with article 28 of the constitution of RF regarding joint confession of faith and the charter of the church, registered with the Ministry of Justice of RF, concerning conducting worship services in residences.

As owners of the building, we have been constantly subjected to various illegal and baseless fines on the part of the Department of Architecture of the city of Sayanogorsk and the

Ministry of Construction of the republic of Khakasiia. DAGN of the city of Sayanogorsk did not accept documents for the reconstruction of the building. When we received through BTI state registration of the right of ownership of the building, the BTI employee who gave us the tech-passport for the building was arrested at work by FSB officers and taken to the police department where he was subjected to interrogation and threats, accusing him of corruption, graft, aiding American (!) sectarians, etc.

In 2009, on the initiative of the prosecutor's office of the city of Sayanogorsk a judicial procedure for confiscating our building was begun. On 8 July 2010, the lawsuit for confiscation, with all the violations of our residential, material, and procedural rights, was confirmed by the Supreme Court of the republic of Khakasiia.

Mr. President: We ask you to protect our rights as citizens of the Russian federation. We appeal to you in the hope that we still live in a law-based state, where the constitution reigns and not lawlessness for the benefit of some people's subjective interests.

With respect,
S.I. Vashchenko
V.V. Osmukhin

13.08.2010

"A plan of organisational and operational search measures"

By Felix Corley and Geraldine Fagan

Forum 18 (12.08.2010) / HRWF (17.08.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> -With the repeated refusal by Russian state officials to explain why and by whom moves against Jehovah's Witnesses and readers of the works of Muslim theologian Said Nursi were initiated, members of those communities can only guess their motivation. The broad range of agencies involved - including courts, the police, the FSB security service, and prosecutor's offices - is clear from official statements and court judgments. An examination by Forum 18 News Service of internal government documents concerning the Jehovah's Witnesses, however, reveals that the campaign against them is co-ordinated at a high level - and relies on Soviet-style intrusive surveillance.

One document from the southern resort of Sochi points to close FSB scrutiny of the Jehovah's Witnesses' Russian headquarters far to the north in St Petersburg. It also indicates that the state knew of Jehovah's Witness plans for a public protest before they were revealed to anyone outside the religious community. Other documents show that the security agencies collect extensive information about individual Jehovah's Witnesses, as well as their group activity. By routinely referring to the Jehovah's Witnesses as a "destructive religious organisation" or "religious organisation of extremist orientation" even though they are legally registered in Russia, the documents also support the Jehovah's Witnesses' view that the authorities want a complete ban on their organisation, not just its religious literature.

Adding a new twist to Soviet-style tactics, one document also reveals that police shared "operational information" about a named Jehovah's Witness with a Russian Orthodox Church diocese, and sought two diocese's views on Jehovah's Witness beliefs and practices.

The campaign

Jehovah's Witnesses have long suspected that the ongoing action against them is co-ordinated from above rather than independent initiatives by local officials.

In the space of three weeks in spring 2009, prosecutor's offices conducted more than 500 visits and other checks on Jehovah's Witness communities across Russia, looking for errors in their statutes, records of decisions, registration and property documents, as well as checking whether their activity was in accordance with their statutes. Later that year, prosecutors in various parts of Russia initiated court cases to ban specific Jehovah's Witness literature as "extremist".

This led to the key December 2009 Supreme Court ruling, upholding an earlier decision by Rostov-on-Don Regional Court outlawing 34 Jehovah's Witness titles as extremist and dissolving the local Jehovah's Witness religious organisation in Taganrog.

Since that decision, Jehovah's Witnesses who spread their faith on the street or door to door have faced increased police interrogations, threats and fines.

Forum 18 has repeatedly asked the Interior Ministry, the FSB security service, the General Prosecutor's Office and other state agencies why the campaign was launched. Officials refuse or fail to comment, refer Forum 18 to other state agencies or to court judgments, or deny that any centralised state campaign is underway.

For example, Forum 18 has received no response to written questions sent on 8 June to Sergei Ignatchenko, spokesperson for the FSB in Moscow, as to why the campaign was launched, what role the FSB played in it, and what danger to the Russian Federation the FSB sees in Jehovah's Witness activity.

FSB surveillance

The extent of FSB surveillance of the Russian Jehovah's Witness headquarters in St Petersburg and a close interest in their plans for a public protest against state harassment is revealed in an order from Sochi (Krasnodar Region) in Russia's far south.

In the undated order, apparently issued in late February 2010, Colonel Andrei Polyakov, Deputy Head of the Sochi Transport Police within the Interior Ministry, informed 14 different Transport Police offices in and around the Black Sea port of Sochi about a "complex of measures" - unspecified - being taken by Krasnodar Regional FSB "to halt the illegal activity of functionaries of the destructive religious organisation, the Jehovah's Witnesses", received by his agency on 25 February.

The FSB information detailed the various court cases ruling items of Jehovah's Witness literature extremist. As a result, it said, the Jehovah's Witness headquarters in St Petersburg had "unleashed wide-scale propaganda" among Jehovah's Witnesses about the "repressions" which they were suffering. The order also maintains that "data in hand testify to heightened conspiratorial measures by Jehovists [a Soviet-era pejorative term]" to hold meetings, congresses and build Kingdom Halls - all entirely legal activity, Forum 18 notes.

The FSB added that the Jehovah's Witness headquarters had instructed followers to remove literature, documents, membership lists and computers from Kingdom Halls, and "recommended that literature be distributed among adepts' homes." The order also claimed

that Jehovah's Witnesses were trying to re-register communally owned property in the names of loyal individuals.

Jehovah's Witness spokesperson Grigory Martynov has since confirmed to Forum 18 that Jehovah's Witness organisations have stopped using those titles outlawed as extremist at Kingdom Halls in an effort to comply with the ban. Russian law regards mass distribution and storage for mass distribution of banned titles as offences, at least formally allowing individuals to possess personal copies.

The FSB information also said that it knew of plans - drawn up in collaboration with the Jehovah's Witness headquarters in New York - for Russian Jehovah's Witnesses to undertake a nationwide information campaign from 26-28 February 2010 "to draw public attention to the 'persecutions' of the organisation on the part of the Russian authorities". It said they intended to distribute a leaflet named: "Is history repeating itself questions to Russians" - correctly titled, but without punctuation. The FSB also quoted what it said were lines of arguments Jehovah's Witnesses would use in presenting the public with the leaflet, including "More than 300,000 Russians share JW beliefs", and "JWs have existed in Russia for more than 100 years".

"Conspiratorial measures"

"Heightened conspiratorial measures" were claimed by the FSB to surround preparation for the campaign, with ordinary Jehovah's Witnesses to be told of it only on the day it was to be launched.

In order to minimise state disruption to the campaign, ordinary Jehovah's Witnesses were indeed told of its precise nature only on 26 February, Jehovah's Witness spokesperson Grigory Martynov confirmed to Forum 18 on 10 August.

The FSB also cited information that Jehovah's Witness congresses planned to begin on 1 March and would study the book "Come Follow Me". It pointed out that this book was ruled extremist by the December 2009 Supreme Court verdict, and accused the Jehovah's Witnesses of trying to pressure the Russian authorities and present them in a bad light.

"Illegal activity" by Jehovah's Witnesses - such as "organising and conducting any illegal protests or distribution of extremist literature" - was ordered to be reported immediately to the FSB.

Transport Police Colonel Polyakov ordered the 14 Transport Police offices to notify the Regional FSB, as well as his agency, of any such actions.

The Sochi Transport Police order did not reveal how the FSB knew of Jehovah's Witness plans for a public campaign before it had begun, or the title of the leaflet that they were preparing to publish before it had become publicly available. That the title was given with no punctuation may indicate that the FSB heard rather than saw it.

Close scrutiny

Two other documents from the ordinary police, like the Transport Police part of the Interior Ministry, reveal the extent of information gathering about individual Jehovah's Witnesses and their community activity.

In an instruction that appears to have been typed on 9 October 2009 but not sent until 9 March 2010, A. Shtobbe, head of police for the Closed [due to a naval base] Administrative Zone of Fokino in the far eastern Primorye Region, wrote to the head of Teploenergo, the local heating company, calling for tighter security measures. He was ordered to check the "religious views" of job applicants thoroughly and to "take a decision" on members of "religious organisations of extremist orientation", without violating their rights. "Conduct a check-up of employees and staff for membership of the religious organisation of extremist orientation, the Jehovah's Witnesses," instruct three of the orders. "On learning of this given category of persons, pay particular attention to information coming from them to the collective."

Shtobbe also explains that his instruction is being issued in response to a directive from the Interior Ministry "with the aims of securing law and order, anti-terrorist protection and security at especially important and government sites, and aggression in countering the intrusion of xenophobia, and racial and religious extremism".

Following the instruction, Yury Baikin and Olga Cherevko, two of four Jehovah's Witnesses who work at Teploenergo, were asked by their work supervisor to sign a document about terrorism. The pair refused, saying they had nothing to do with either extremism or terrorism.

"A plan of organisational and operational search measures"

In south-western Siberia, a 17 March 2010 Kemerovo Regional Police circular to all local police chiefs, signed by Deputy Police Chief Aleksei Kozhevin, orders subordinates to find out personal details and other information on Jehovah's Witnesses. The circular, which Forum 18 has seen, cites "a plan of organisational and operational search measures to expose, warn and stop the illegal activity of representatives of the religious organisation the Jehovah's Witnesses". The plan had been approved on 5 February by the head of Kemerovo Regional Police, Lieutenant General Aleksandr Elin, and on 10 February by Major General Vladimir Panov.

As part of the plan, local police for every district were ordered to undertake "a survey of citizens by courtyard and flat" to establish what Jehovah's Witness individuals or groups are active.

Information was to be collected on where Jehovah's Witnesses hold meetings, whether registered or "illegally functioning" communities distribute literature, "leaders, elders and adepts (parishioners)", listing names and full details, including telephone numbers and publications they distribute, with copies wherever possible.

The information was to be supplied by 19 March, within two days of the order, to the Regional Police Department for the Organisation of the Activity of Local Police, and to the Subdivision for the Affairs of Minors within the Public Order Police. Local police chiefs were ordered to present this information every three months.

"Jehovah's Witnesses are sort of extremist"

When Forum 18 called the number given on the instruction for reporting information on 8 June, the woman who answered the phone said it was the Department for Crime Prevention. She said she had heard of the February decrees approving the plan but had not seen them. She referred all enquiries to the Police's Counterextremism Centre "as the Jehovah's Witnesses are sort of extremist". Reached the same day, however, the Centre referred

Forum 18 to the Public Order Police, where an official who would not give his name refused to say how many offices had submitted information on Jehovah's Witnesses in their area and what the Police had done with this information.

Reached on 10 June, the duty officer at Kemerovo Regional FSB security service consulted inaudibly with colleagues for some time when Forum 18 asked why it had drawn up a plan to take measures against a religious community which is not illegal. "Where did you get this document?" the officer - who would not give his name - then asked. He said no information could be given by phone, but denied that his organisation was closed to scrutiny. "We are open," he claimed, before putting the phone down.

Such close surveillance of individual Jehovah's Witnesses and communities may account for how traffic police were, for example, able to identify three minibuses of Jehovah's Witnesses to be stopped and searched on the border of Krasnodar and Stavropol Regions on 9 July. If such information gathering also extends to readers of the works of Said Nursi, it may account for how police were able to target a reader on 22 June as he got out of a train at Novosibirsk station .

Officials seek Orthodox Church's help

Despite the constitutional separation of the state from religious organisations, police have on occasion sought the views of local Russian Orthodox dioceses about the Jehovah's Witnesses' beliefs and activity, documents seen by Forum 18 reveal.

On 26 August 2009, Police Colonel Vladimir Shkaev, Head of Kamyshlov Police in Sverdlovsk Region, on the Asian side of the Ural Mountains, wrote to the local diocesan Russian Orthodox Archbishop Dimitry (Kapalin) of Tobolsk and Tyumen, informing him that ten days earlier "operational information" about an "initial verification" had come in about a named local Jehovah's Witness. Colonel Shkaev asked the archbishop's blessing for the diocesan Missionary Department to provide information about the "existence within your diocese of sects of a totalitarian orientation". Of "particular interest" was information about the "possible involvement" of the named Jehovah's Witness in "destructive activity directed against the Orthodox Church on the territory of your diocese".

At the request of the regional police Counterextremism Department, the Russian Orthodox diocese of Kemerovo and Novokuznetsk, in south-western Siberia, produced an assessment of the statutes of the local Jehovah's Witness religious organisation in the city of Kemerovo. Its mostly theological analysis was produced under the diocese's February 2007 co-operation agreement with Kemerovo regional administration. Posted on the website of prominent anti-cultist Aleksandr Dvorkin's St Irenaeus of Lyons Informational Consultation Centre on 24 May 2010, the nine-page assessment refutes the Jehovah's Witnesses' self-identification as Christians, and states that the Jehovah's Witness interpretation of Scripture is "very far not only from traditional interpretations, but also from the laws of logic". As the Jehovah's Witnesses' main aim is to promote and increase circulation of their literature, it claims in conclusion, the entire organisation is not religious at all, but "bears all the hallmarks of a commercial cult".

So far there has been no sign that either of these state moves to co-opt the opposition of the Russian Orthodox Church has had any impact on local Jehovah's Witnesses, Grigory Martynov of the Jehovah's Witnesses told Forum 18 on 10 August.

Library books controlled

As many Jehovah's Witness titles were banned and entered onto the Federal List of Extremist Materials, various state agencies moved to limit public access to them. Under a 29 March 2010 instruction to public libraries issued by Vladimir Zaitsev, general director of the Russian National Library, library holdings which feature on the Federal List are to be marked with a special symbol - an exclamation mark within a circle - to indicate that access to them is restricted. While such titles may still be stored in libraries, they may not be copied or exhibited, and are to be read within designated reading rooms.

Also according to the instruction, persons wishing to read a library holding on the Federal List must first fill out a form requesting the publication and confirming that they have been warned that it is on the List and not subject to mass distribution.

Russia's supervisory body for information technology and mass communications, Roskomnadzor, announced on 30 April that it has annulled permission to import "The Watchtower" and "Awake!" publications.

Pastor in Russian Republic of Dagestan killed

Media had spread call to take action against him for his work among Muslims

By Wayne King

JCompass Direct (28.07.2011) / HRWF (29.07.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - A pastor in the Russian republic of Dagestan known for founding the biggest Protestant church in the region and for successfully reaching out to Muslims has been killed by unidentified gunmen, local authorities have confirmed.

Artur Suleimanov, 49, pastor of Hosanna Christian Church in Makhachkala, the capital of Dagestan, was shot on the evening of July 15 while leaving his church building.

The identity of the shooters remains unclear, but in the weeks leading up to the killing, Dagestan media broadcast calls for people to take measures against Suleimanov because he was too "active" and converted ethnic Muslims.

Suleimanov founded Hosanna Christian Church in Makhachkala in 1994. It started out as a small prayer group, but now with 1,000 members it is the largest Protestant church in the Northern Caucasus region. According to a letter Suleimanov wrote to Compass several years ago, 80 percent of the congregation is made up of former Muslims.

The congregation established other branch churches throughout Dagestan and a formal Bible study center at the Makhachkala church. Suleimanov also equipped the church to distribute food and other aid to residents of the poverty-ridden country.

His death follows the shooting of Orthodox priest Daniil Sisoiev of St.Thomas church in Moscow last November; a Muslim group claimed responsibility for the slaying.

Suleimanov is survived by his wife, Zina, and five children.

Dagestan is a small Russian republic of about 2.6 million people in the Caucasus Mountains on the border with Chechnya. Ethnic Avars, Dargins and Lezgins, who are all traditionally Muslim, make up almost 75 percent of Dagestan's population. In total, 91 percent of the

population is Muslim, with the remaining 9 percent being Christian, mostly Russian Orthodox.

Because of Dagestan's location, its population is trapped in a long-standing feud between Russia and the Chechen separatists fighting next door. The political realities of the conflict often bleed into Dagestan, resulting in civilian deaths.

The Russian government has from time to time cracked down on the Wahhabis, a sect of Sunni Islam with separatist tendencies. The Muslims in turn persecute Christians, because they see Christianity, and Orthodoxy in particular, as a Russian religion. Many converts to Christianity have to practice their faith in small, discreet home groups.

As an ethnic Avar, Suleimanov was considered by many Muslims to be an apostate and therefore deserving of death. But part of his success in reaching people was the fact that he was native to the region. Missionaries from outside Dagestan have met with mixed success.

In 1998, Herbert Gregg, one of the few U.S. pastors to live in Dagestan, was kidnapped. He was taken to Chechnya, where he was tortured, including having one of his fingers cut off. He was released after eight months of captivity and no longer lives in Russia.

Sergei Ryakhovsky, a Pentecostal minister active in Russia who presided over Suleimanov's funeral, compared his killing to the 2009 shooting of Orthodox priest Sisoiev.

On Nov. 19, 2009, a masked gunman entered St. Thomas church in Moscow and shot Sisoiev four times. Sisoiev, who was also known for his work among Muslims, died while being transported to a hospital. Before the shooting, he received numerous death threats from Islamic activists. After the shooting, a Muslim group linked to the Caucasus claimed responsibility for the killing.

A month later in Makhachkala, Russian law enforcement officers shot and killed Bek Sultan Kerybekov. According to police, Kerybekov pulled out a pistol and threw a grenade at a police substation when traffic officers stopped him to check his identification. Police later said the pistol found on his body forensically matched the weapon used in the Sisoiev slaying.

"It seems that [Suleimanov's killing] is in the same row with the murder of the Orthodox priest," Ryakhovsky said to Interfaks-religion news agency. "But you cannot scare Christians with murders; for Christians to die for Christ is an honor."

One of the publications calling for action against Suleimanov drew links between the missionary activities of Suleimanov and Sisoiev among Muslims.

The Moscow-based Slavic Centre for Law and Justice and the Institute of Law and Religion issued a statement about Suleimanov shortly after the shooting. Saying he was a charming man and one of the most well-known Christian ministers in Russia, they called him a "true missionary with fervent heart and sincere faith."

"He was a man of faith who fearlessly preached the gospel, sharing the faith in Christ with people even in difficult circumstances," the statement read. "Since the beginning of his mission, Pastor Artur Suleimanov prayed for the salvation of Dagestan nations, despite all the difficulties and threatening that the community and preachers faced."

Law on extremism misused again against Jehovah's Witnesses in Mari El

Stetson University/ Russia Religion News (07.08.20110) / HRWF (12.08.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - In Yoshkar-Ola of the Mari El republic a criminal case has been instigated against Jehovah's Witnesses for allegedly arousing hatred or strife.

"Members of the religious organization have distributed literature that is included in the list of extremist materials and they have conducted public propaganda whose contents dealt with exclusivity and the superiority of adherents of the Jehovah's Witnesses religious association over representatives of other religion," the investigative administration of the Investigative Committee of the Procuracy of Russian Federation for Mari El reports. However, the same brochures are distributed worldwide without causing any problems.

During searches, a substantial quantity of religious literature was confiscated. The seized pamphlets will be subjected to analysis and expert investigation.

The case was opened on the basis of article 282 of the Criminal Code of RF (incitement of hatred or strife along with demeaning of human dignity).

Operational support on the case was provided by agents of FSB and MVD for Mari El. At the present time, operational measures and investigative activities are being conducted.

Attempt to impose Orthodox values on employees draws reaction

Is it possible to drive subordinates into Orthodoxy?

Stetson University/ Russia Religion News (07.08.20110) / HRWF (13.08.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> -Vasily Boiko-Velikii, president of the "Russkoe Moloko" holding company sent a letter to employees of "Russkoe Moloko" and of all companies that are members of the "Your Financial Guardian" group of companies. Specifically, the document says:

"In order to promote repentance within our nation, the council of directors of the 'Russkoe Moloko' holding company has adopted the following decision:

1. All employees of all enterprises, during work time and non-work time, must take the academic course "Foundations of Orthodox Culture," which has been confirmed by the Ministry of Education of Russia as obligatory, during the upcoming academic year.
2. All employees working in the "Russkoe Moloko" agricultural holding company and of other enterprises of the "Your Financial Guardian" group of companies, in the event of pregnancy, will earn the average salary in full until the new-born child reaches one year of age;
3. All employees who have an abortion or facilitate an abortion are subject to dismissal by elimination of their position;

4. All employees who are married but were not married in church who do not have a church wedding before 14 October 2010, the feast of the Protection of the Mother of God, are subject to dismissal by elimination of their position;

5. Newly hired employees who are married but were not married in church must be married in church within the probationary period (three months).

I call people to pray for mitigation of the flames and the quenching of the fires.

I ask the accountants of the enterprises to organize a collection of contributions from employees who wish to provide help for victims of the fires."

V. Boiko-Velikii explains these measures as necessary to turn aside from Russia God's wrath expressed particularly in the drought and fires. The president of the company does not think the dismissals will be a violation of the labor code. "We will terminate the positions in which these people are working, not the people themselves, and we will distribute their duties among the remaining employees," Boiko-Velikii noted.

Regions.ru asked some clergymen to comment on this document.

Archpriest Alexander Saltykov, rector of the church of the Resurrection in Kadashi, does not see anything wrong in Mr. Boiko-Velikii's decision. "I have known the president of the 'Russkoe Moloko' for a long time and I consider his activity with great sympathy. It seems to me quite natural that an Orthodox businessman tries in his activity to operate upon the values of Christian culture and tries to draw his employees into it. In our time this is one of the most critical tasks in our country. I think also that any healthy minded person should support the struggle against murder of children," he said. "So I completely support all these initiatives and I want to wish for God's help for these good deeds," Fr Alexander added.

Priest Dimitry Arzumanov, rector of the church of the Blessed John of Kronstadt in Zhulebino, called with some irony the step of the head of the "Russkoe Moloko" company "a brave decision." "Of course, it is impossible to dismiss workers because they, perhaps, are insufficiently Orthodox or don't want to be such. I am categorically against this. Incidentally, this contradicts our secular legislation," he said. "But I think that a businessman has the right to hire people because of their religious convictions. That is a different thing. And I consider working for the religious enlightenment and improvement of morals within a Christian spirit in our enterprises to be very important and necessary. In this I unconditionally support the businessman," Fr Dimitry added.

The head of the department of theology of the Esenin Riazan State University, priest Luka Stepanov, sees "excessive determination" in the decision of the company's president. "In this document one sees a certain extremism, excessive attempt to establish formal piety within his company. One cannot but sympathize with the desire of the leadership to promote Orthodox culture and dignity on the staff of one's employees. But, of course, such methods are not weighty because a person's will is responsible for faith and it is impossible to make a person pious against his will, even for the sake of maintaining family relationships in the workplace," he noted.

"It is a different matter that, so long as legislation is not violated, the director has the right to conduct his own personnel policy. But often the directors themselves lack the theological education or pastoral abilities that would help them find some more mild forms of drawing their employees to Orthodoxy," Fr Luka thinks. "I know large organizations whose directors are sincere believers and church folk, who cautiously, like a restorer with a brush, work on

teaching piety to their subordinates. This step might evoke only ridicule and dissatisfaction of the public that is not ready for 'unanimous' piety. And what is more, there will not be here any words of gratitude toward the directors for their attempt to abolish ignorance and lack of spiritual culture by such a decisive manner," he concluded.

Priest Sergii Kruglov, clergyman of the Savior cathedral of Minusinsk, Krasnoyarsk territory, and a famous poet, does not rule out the possibility of judicial investigations on this matter. "There are people who know the law and who know their rights. They could go to court over this, since Russia still is a secular state," he explained.

"This thing confirms my long-held thoughts, and not only mine, that everything depends not so much on the law as on people themselves. If, let's say, the head of an enterprise thinks he can do such and such. Why did the attempt to introduce into the schools the 'Foundations of Orthodox Culture' fail? Because in one place a teacher did not want it and in another the principal did not want it. The human factor is very important. And it will be the same here," Fr Sergii suggested.

"Whether society will oppose such a decision or not is unknown. But it is necessary to understand that any force has nothing in common with Christianity. A slave is not a devout person," he reminded.

Deacon Ioann Kornienko, a famous Orthodox community member and evangelist, does not agree with the position of the president of "Russkoe Moloko." "Personally I cannot support such a worldview in which the faith or religion of people is subjected to uniformity. Faith is to a great extent an intimate part of human life and nobody should pressure people's consciences," he said. [. . .] (tr. by PDS, posted 13 August 2010)

Court deprives Pentecostal mother of parental rights

Stetson University/ Russia Religion News (06.08.20110) / HRWF (12.08.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - The Davlekanovo regional court of Bashkortostan deprived 27-year-old Alla Fedorova of parental rights with respect to her five-year-old daughter, Azaliia, because she is a parishioner of an evangelical church. Alla, who has been living in Moscow along with her daughter and husband, learned about this decision of the Davlekanovo regional court by chance; she had not even been informed that there was a hearing on this case that was important for their family, the press service of the Russian Associated Union of Christians of Evangelical Faith reported on 10 August.

Alla's former husband submitted to the court a petition regarding deprivation of parental rights. He had not been paying alimony and had not communicated with the daughter for several years. However the real initiator of the proceedings was Alla's mother, Nedezhda Petrovna, a businesswoman who is well known in the city. After the divorce from her husband, Alla, having a small daughter, began attending an evangelical church, which displeased her mother, who was biased against the "sect." Upon her mother's request, Alla talked with an Orthodox priest and psychologist, who did not find anything dangerous or pathological in her conduct.

After the court's decision became known, the young mother, who had moved to Moscow and entered a new marriage, turned for help to the Russian Associated Union of Christians of Evangelical Faith, the Public Chamber of RF, the plenipotentiary for children's rights of RF, and the prosecutor's office of Bashkiria. On 3 August there was a review of the case in

which a multitude of violations were discovered, and the court's decision regarding denial of parental rights was rescinded.

During a visit to her mother's, Alla was given psychotropic drugs and subjected to forcible detention. Since 5 August the parents have been keeping Alla in their home and her husband is not permitted to see her. Alla's daughter, Azaliia, is at an unknown location. Alla's husband, Andrei, turned for help to the police of the city of Davlekanovo, who actually refused him any help.

"Davlekanovo is a small town where everybody knows one another," Andrei says. "It seems that here everybody is connected to one another like in some kind of ant hill; the laws are completely inoperative here and nobody can help us. One gets the feeling that police officers specifically are playing for time and do not want to solve the problem. I am very distressed for Alla. Her mother even threatened to kill her daughter, the "sectarian." After all that has happened I do not know what to expect from her."

Baptist punished for conducting Sunday school

By Pavel Belkov

Stetson University/ Russia Religion News (06.08.2010) / HRWF (12.08.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - The presbyter of the church of Evangelical Christians-Baptists of the city of Millerovo in Rostov province, Roman Panasenko, appealed in the court of second instance a decision of a municipal judge of the first judicial district of Millerovo region of Rostov province, E.A. Bugaeva, holding the church administratively responsible for alleged illegal conduct of non-profit activity without special permission (license). The judicial session in the court of second instance, scheduled for 21 July, was postponed to a later time.

The basis for opening the case were the results of an inquiry conducted by the district prosecutor of Millerovo, A.V. Bukin, into the church's placing of an announcement in the "Millerovo Yarmarka" newspaper and the organization in the church of a Christian Bible study circle and a "Future" club, through which the church conducted religious education of its adherents by means of Bible study. In essence both the circle and the club functioned as a Sunday school in the church.

The materials of the case show clearly that the local religious organization of the Evangelical Christian-Baptist church of Millerovo carried out its activity in accordance with its charter, and the circle and club created within it without the status of a legal entity were not professional religious institutions subject to licensing in accordance with article 19 of the federal law "On freedom of conscience and religious associations," but serve for the teaching of religion and religious education of the adherents of the church. They are not institutions of advanced education, as the judge concluded in her decision. The teachers were members of the church, that is, the education was conducted by nonprofessional teachers. The invitation through the news media was the legal right of the church "to disseminate religious convictions" (article 3 of federal law "On freedom of conscience and religious associations").

The prosecutor and the court did not consider that the right of a religious organization to teach its followers is an inalienable right that flows from the right to freedom of conscience guaranteed by both the constitution of the Russian federation (art. 28) and the European Convention on Protection of Human Rights and Basic Freedoms (art. 9). In addition, art. 6 of the federal law "On freedom of conscience and religious associations" proclaims as one of

the basic indicators of a religious association "teaching of religion and religious education of its adherents." The law does not regulate the forms of teaching. It can be carried out in game form (drawing, sculpture, etc) as well as in the reading of sermons, conducting discussions, seminars, and lectures.

The court and prosecutor mistakenly categorized the actions of the church in teaching religion as educational activity that requires a license. The court did not take into account the decision of the Judicial College on Civil Affairs of the Supreme Court of Russia, rendered on 10 June 2008, in a similar case involving the "United Methodist Church" local religious organization of the city of Smolensk. In that case, the judicial instances of the city of Smolensk tried to liquidate the Sunday school of the Methodist church under the pretense that it was conducting its educational activity without a license.

Appeal filed with ECHR regarding allegations of extremism

Jehovah's Witnesses submit the Gorno-Altaysk case

JW Official Website (05.08.2010) / HRWF (06.08.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Having exhausted all domestic options within Russia and seeing that the existing legislation has only opened the way to increased intolerance, discrimination, and acts of violence, Jehovah's Witnesses are forced to pursue justice elsewhere.

On July 23, 2010, the Local Religious Organization of Jehovah's Witnesses of Gorno-Altaysk submitted an appeal to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) against the judgment of the Supreme Court of the Altay Republic that declared 18 of their Christian publications "extremist."

It is noteworthy that the Supreme Court of the republic allowed only the local organization of Jehovah's Witnesses in Gorno-Altaysk to defend issues of the Watchtower and Awake! magazines against accusations of "extremism." The court refused to allow the representatives of the author and publisher to participate in the case, ruling that their rights were not affected. Less than three months later, the Federal Service for Oversight of Communications, Information Technologies, and Mass Communications (Roskomnadzor) individually listed the magazines that had been declared "extremist" in the judgment as a basis for revoking the permit to distribute these journals throughout Russia.

For 160,000 Jehovah's Witnesses active in Russia, which is almost three times the population of Gorno-Altaysk, the judgment rendered has led to a flood of oppression. Also affected are some nine hundred thousand individuals in Russia who regularly choose to read The Watchtower and Awake! each month. Those individuals will no longer be able to read these Bible-based journals that have enriched their lives by providing spiritual guidance for them and their families.

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Jehovah's Witness war veteran prosecuted for extremism

By Geraldine Fagan and Felix Corley

Forum 18 (04.08.2010) / HRWF (05.08.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Aleksei Fedorin, an 85-year-old Russian veteran of the Second World War, is the first Jehovah's Witness known to have been prosecuted for distributing extremist material, Forum 18 News Service has learnt. The prosecution is the latest turn in the ongoing nationwide state campaign against the Jehovah's Witnesses, which gathered speed with the addition of numerous Jehovah's Witness books and brochures to the Federal List of Extremist Materials in March 2010. Earlier such prosecutions have involved Islamic literature.

Fedorin, a Jehovah's Witness for 50 years, was fined 1,000 Roubles (99 Norwegian Kroner, 13 Euros, or 17 US Dollars) on 28 July, for the offence of "production and distribution of extremist materials" under Article 20.29 of the Administrative Violations Code, by Judge Viktoria Samokhina of Tselina District Court. He denied the charges, explaining that the local police officer who initiated the case gathered copies of various Jehovah's Witness titles he had distributed to his neighbours in the village of Sredny Yegorlyk (Rostov-on-Don Region) over several years before they were banned in December 2009, but claimed to Tselina District Public Prosecutor's Office that Fedorin had distributed them in June 2010.

According to the Jehovah's Witnesses, Tselina District Public Prosecutor Aleksandr Lysenin interrogated Fedorin for eight and a half hours without a lunchbreak on 26 July, even though the war veteran suffers from dizziness and faints. Classified as disabled, Fedorin insisted that he was ill and did not take part in any religious activity on the days in June he is alleged to have distributed the literature.

Judge Viktoria Samokhina categorically refused to comment on her decision to Forum 18 on 3 August.

A combine harvester driver in his youth, Fedorin was awarded several Soviet awards and medals for his labour and also fought in the Second World War. When the KGB secret police discovered he was a Jehovah's Witness in the 1960s, he was repeatedly sacked, leading him to move to the Soviet republic of Uzbekistan, where the KGB continued to pursue him. He served five years in a prison camp because the authorities viewed his religious convictions as "anti-Soviet".

Law enforcement agencies have recently obstructed public and private religious activity by Baptists, Hare Krishnas and Jehovah's Witnesses. In the course of this the authorities have acted with undue severity against elderly or infirm Jehovah's Witnesses both in public, and during raids on private homes.

Other prosecutions

Earlier prosecutions under Article 20.29's offence of "production and distribution of extremist materials" have been for distributing controversially banned religious literature have involved Islamic titles. In late 2008, a Moscow chain of bookshops was fined 50,000 roubles (10,809 Norwegian Kroner, 1,160 Euros or 1,535 US Dollars) for stocking "The Personality of a Muslim", a book promoting tolerance by Arab theologian Muhammad ali Al-Hashimi. In August 2008, a bookseller in Saratov was handed down a lesser fine for stocking two copies of the same title.

A case opened under Article 20.29 is also pending against Komil Odilov, a Muslim reader of the theologian Said Nursi.

In the few previous cases against Jehovah's Witnesses in connection with their now-banned literature, law enforcement agents have prosecuted Jehovah's Witnesses on other grounds, including with little-used provisions in some regional Administrative Codes for "harassment with the aim of imposing religious convictions".

In the southern region of Belgorod, Jehovah's Witness Sergei Ishchenko was recently fined 1,000 Roubles for this offence and a further 500 Roubles for not having missionary accreditation under the region's 2001 Law on Missionary Activity. This Law encouraged several other regions to produce their own anti-missionary laws.

On 27 November 2009, a team from the Belgorod police Counterextremism Department swooped on Ishchenko after he discussed his faith with a second man on a bench in a central Belgorod street and gave him a copy of "What Does the Bible Really Teach?". Apparently determined to prosecute Ishchenko, city prosecutor Andrei Shestakov had previously attempted to launch a criminal case against him five times, but failed as the ban on the title had not come into force at the time of the incident.

While they have not resulted in prosecution so far, a further five criminal investigations into extremist activity are currently open in Asbest (Sverdlovsk Region), Chelyabinsk, Gorno-Altai (Altai Republic), Omsk and Tambov, Grigory Martynov of the Jehovah's Witnesses told Forum 18 on 14 July.

Public prosecutors in Lipetsk and Tula Regions issued official extremism warnings on 7 May and 31 March respectively to individuals for distributing banned titles, the Moscow-based Sova Center reported on 18 June. Under the federal 2002 Extremism Law, failure to comply with such a warning may result in prosecution.

The Jehovah's Witnesses note some success in defending their members in Cherepovets (Vologda Region), where 25 civil cases against Jehovah's Witnesses were dropped in June, and Tambov, where the regional court ruled on 15 April that a 17 March search warrant for the home of the Cheprunov family was unlawful.

FSB recruitment attempt?

After being summoned to the police station in Aksai (Rostov-on-Don Region) on 12 May, Jehovah's Witness Andrei Goncharov was threatened by a man who identified himself as "Roman Kolesnikov, head of counterextremism in the district for the organs" (an apparent reference to the FSB security service), as he told Forum 18 on 29 July. The officer explained that non-legal measures - such as planted drugs and weaponry or apparently random action by criminals - could be used against him as an alternative to legal prosecution should he fail to co-operate with the authorities.

Goncharov was then taken by car from the police station to a nearby office with a smaller portrait of Lenin and a larger one of Felix Dzerzhinsky - founder of the brutal Bolshevik secret police - on the wall. There he was threatened with prosecution under Article 239 of the Criminal Code ("organisation of an association infringing upon the person and rights of the citizen") if he failed to inform on fellow Jehovah's Witnesses. When he refused, the officer told him how "people change their minds after two months in a temporary detention facility".

"Kolesnikov" told Goncharov that they had tried to "talk to" other Jehovah's Witnesses, but had not "made contact" with them, euphemisms for recruiting informers. Goncharov told Forum 18 that he knows of fellow Jehovah's Witnesses who have been pressured to inform for the FSB, but who refused.

Goncharov went to the police station in the first place having been summoned for questioning on 7 May by Captain Eduard Paly of the ordinary police, but the meeting was delayed until 12 May. Captain Paly told Forum 18 on 9 June that Goncharov was one of some 6,000 local people summoned for questioning over four murders that took place in 2008-9, though he stressed he has since been eliminated from enquiries. He claimed that on 12 May he asked Goncharov to wait as he was in a meeting, and when he returned to question him he was gone.

Mikhail Reznikov, head of Aksai District Police, adamantly denied to Forum 18 on 9 June that any officer named Kolesnikov works for the police. He equally denied that any officer could have threatened anyone or tried to recruit them as an informer. "That would be illegal – it wouldn't happen," he claimed. He also denied that Goncharov could have been questioned by an official from another agency. "I would know if anyone from another agency came in to interview someone on police premises."

Rostov-on-Don Regional FSB security service denied absolutely to Forum 18 on 9 June that any officer named Roman Kolesnikov works for them in the region.

Goncharov told Forum 18 that "Kolesnikov" had taken part in a raid on Aksai's Jehovah's Witness congregation in the summer of 2009, but did not give his name or present any official identification.

He added that in the days after Forum 18's interview with Police Chief Reznikov, he had received a call from him checking that he had no complaints against the police and telling him that if anyone tries to recruit him as an informer he should inform the police.

Campaign source

While Rostov-on-Don was not the first region to pursue a ban on Jehovah's Witness literature, its regional court's 11 September 2009 ruling – upheld by the Supreme Court on 8 December 2009 – sparked the present campaign.

That ruling rests overwhelmingly on the view that Jehovah's Witness literature is extremist because it criticises other religions – and that harsh state sanctions are therefore justified. Regarding the banned children's publication "My Book of Bible Stories", for example, the verdict's evidence of extremism is that the book regards traditional Christianity as a false religion under satanic influence, and clerics as hypocritical, self-interested and cruel. The full evidence given for this are five quotations from the book, differing from established Biblical interpretation: "Satan the Devil wanted to kill the Son of God... Therefore no other than Satan lit the star [of Bethlehem]"; "Who were these enemies? Correct – religious leaders"

"The priests killed Jesus just as they chose to free Barabbas and then shouted to Pilate to kill him, not the people"; "Religious leaders are not able to contain their rage!"; "He understands that some of them have been deceived by religious leaders".

In Russia, strong rejection of others' religious or non-religious world views – as with such statements – is increasingly interpreted by the authorities as extremism which may be met with heavy state sanctions. However, many argue that free and open discussion – including

strong criticism - of religious and non-religious views is an inalienable part of a free society. This also includes strong criticism of statements regarded as extreme.

Baptist and Jehovah's Witness worship services raided

By Felix Corley and Geraldine Fagan

Forum 18 (02.08.2010) / HRWF (03.08.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - A 9 July raid on a Jehovah's Witness service in Kirovo-Chepetsk (Kirov Region) is the latest in a series of raids on worship services, many involving the FSB security service, Forum 18 News Service notes. "The unexpected arrival during a peaceful religious service of such a number of people in uniform disturbed the believers and obstructed its usual course," the Jehovah's Witnesses complained.

The ongoing nationwide state campaign against the Jehovah's Witnesses has seen more than ten raids on their worship in 2010.

A group of officials - including an FSB officer and two Prosecutor's Office investigators - conducted the latest Jehovah's Witness raid. Despite finding nothing illegal during their search of the building, they held back all those who had taken part in the service and wrote down each one's name, address and telephone number, informing them that they would later be summoned for questioning. From 12 July, investigators interrogated more than 20 congregation members. According to the Jehovah's Witnesses, they were most interested in the structure of the community, its aims and goals, members' religious convictions and the distribution of religious literature.

The duty officer at the Kirov Region FSB referred all enquiries to their spokesperson Svetlana Mikhailovna (whose surname he refused to give), but on 29 July her telephone went unanswered.

Baptists raided

On 18 April, about 12 state officials including an FSB security service officer, Emergency Situations Ministry personnel and others in civilian clothes raided the Sunday morning worship service of the Council of Churches Baptist congregation in Elektrostal (Moscow Region). The unregistered church meets in a private home.

The officials immediately called for the service to be halted and for all those present to show their identity documents. "Despite our objections, everything was filmed on a video-camera from the start," church members complained. The officials then presented a photocopy of a court decision "to conduct searches of homes and ancillary premises belonging to the International Council of Evangelical Christians/Baptists and to record all the people found there .. in view of the fact that meetings of an unregistered religious organisation are held in them". Officials refused to give the Baptists a copy of the decision; as the photocopy was poor they say it was impossible to read the signature of the judge.

Despite what the decision implies, Russian law does not require religious communities to register or seek state permission for home worship, Forum 18 notes.

In the absence of and without permission from the home owner, the officials searched and photographed each room, including the attic. They also took several private letters without

drawing up an official record. Questioned in turn, church members were forced to say where they live and work, how often and since when they attend church, and to name the church's leader. They were also asked how much they contribute to church funds and about the church's distribution of literature. One officer reportedly suggested to a church member "Don't come here, go to the [Orthodox] church, pray there and light a candle".

Pastor Andrei Meshcherin of the church was detained for two and a half hours at local police station. When he refused to say where he worked, FSB officer Rychazhkov told him he knew where he worked anyway, "and soon we will have you sacked".

Late on 19 April, a group of youths shouting at the "Baptist sectarians" came to the church building, banged on the doors and broke all the front windows. Church members suspect the authorities may have encouraged the attack.

Rychazhkov of the FSB threatened the church with a court case, saying that it would be closed down as it is unregistered. A case was later launched under the Administrative Violations Code over what officials claimed was a lack of fire extinguishers. However, on 29 April Elektrostal Town Court halted the case "because of a lack of the substance of an administrative offence," Pastor Meshcherin told Forum 18 on 10 June.

Pastor Meshcherin also said FSB officer Rychazhkov had visited the church in autumn 2009 under the guise of checking up identity documents of those present.

Officers at Elektrostal FSB refused to discuss why the Baptist church has been raided more than once while at worship, with the participation of their officers. "I'm not authorised to give any information," one officer told Forum 18 on 10 June. He said he personally had not taken part in any of the raids. He also denied that they have any officer named Rychazhkov.

Other 2010 raids on worship

On the morning of 4 June, police raided two worship premises and five Jehovah's Witness homes in Omsk, seizing literature, documents, computers and sound equipment - in one instance even noting down the contents of a first aid kit. Omsk Regional Public Prosecutor's Office opened a criminal case against the local Jehovah's Witness religious organisation under Article 282, Part 1 ("actions directed at the incitement of hatred or enmity, as well as the humiliation of human dignity"), suspecting it of circulating extremist literature among members, the Prosecutor's Office reported on its website on 7 June.

On 15 April, nine police Counterextremism Department officers arrived to raid a Jehovah's Witness worship service in Komsomolsk-on-Amur (Khabarovsk Region). After Nikolai Kovadnev asked them not to interrupt, he was held in a temporary detention facility for 48 hours and fined 500 Roubles (99 Norwegian Kroner, 13 Euros, or 17 US Dollars) for allegedly obstructing police. The police officers agreed to question worshippers after the service, and did not allow anyone to leave the building for its duration.

From 24-25 March, law enforcement agents raided three Jehovah's Witness worship services and - having thereby obtained names and addresses - four members' homes in Ryazan Region, seizing religious literature, recorded music, films, personal correspondence, diaries and computers.

Eleven police officers armed with automatic weapons and accompanied by police dogs raided the Sunday morning service of a Lutheran congregation in Kaluga on 28 February, looking

for alleged "extremist literature". The pastor subsequently produced advice about how to behave during a raid.

Homes raided

In their search for banned Jehovah's Witness literature, police also continue to raid private homes, including those of the elderly and infirm:

On the morning of 23 June, police raided the home of wheelchair-bound Robert Kozyrev in Nogir (North Ossetia Republic), seizing outlawed Jehovah's Witness literature.

On 24 March, police in Zalesovo (Altai Region) telephoned Irma Mikhel, an elderly Jehovah's Witness in very poor health, and summoned her for questioning. When she refused, two officers of the FSB security and ordinary police pushed their way into her home and started examining her bookcase, pulling out titles on Biblical themes. When Mikhel protested that these were not banned, the FSB officer replied: "Not yet, but they soon will be." Taking her to a local police station, they then interrogated her for three hours and forced her to sign a statement saying she had given up her literature voluntarily.

Outdoor public religious activity by Russian Jehovah's Witnesses, Hare Krishna devotees and Protestants has also resulted in state harassment.

The Traffic Police and other law enforcement agencies continue to stop and search Jehovah's Witnesses and Muslim readers of Said Nursi's works for literature banned under counterextremism legislation.

Jehovah's Witness fined for literature distribution

85-YEAR OLD JEHOVAH'S WITNESS ACCUSED OF "EXTREMISM"

Stetson University/ Religion News (30.07.2010) / HRWF (04.08.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Aleksei Nikitovich Fedorin--an 85-year-old invalid, 2nd class, father of three daughters and having three grandchildren and two great-grandchildren--was accused of violation of the law entailing "heightened public danger." The court assigned to Aleksei Fedorin a punishment in the form of administrative fine of 1,000 rubles, the press service of the Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia reports.

Aleksei Fedorin himself has professed the Jehovah's Witnesses' religion for a half-century now and he thinks that the case against him was fabricated.

After the decision of the court took effect regarding the Taganrog congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses, Police Inspector Sergei Chernigovsky collected in the village of Srednii Egorlyk (Rostov province) individual publications of the Jehovah's Witnesses that A.N. Fedorin had distributed to his neighbors over the course of the preceding years and he delivered to the prosecutor's office a report in which he declared that A.N. Fedorin had distributed them in June 2010, which was after they had been included in the list of "extremist materials," which meant that he should be found guilty of the mass distribution of "extremist" literature.

Regional Prosecutor Aleksander Lysenin summoned A.N. Fedorin on 26 July and questioned the elderly man at the police department from 7.30 to 16.00, without lunch, despite the fact that the man suffers from dizziness and fainting. Only later did Fedorin learn from the

prosecutor's statement that he is charged with distribution of literature on 15, 16, 18, and 20 June 2010. Fedorin said that during this time he was sick and did not engage in religious activity.

Judge Viktoria Samokhina, ignoring the state of the health of the defendant and in violation of article 24.2 of the Code of Administrative Law Violations of RF regarding the public nature of judicial investigations, did not permit his associates to attend the session. The court secretary declared: "There is no circus here for you!" A. Fedorin clearly stated during the session that he did not distribute literature in 2010. But the judge did not mention this statement in her court decree and on 28 July found his actions as "massive distribution of extremist materials" that entailed "heightened public danger."

At the present time A.N. Fedorin is trying to appeal against the actions of officials and the ruling of the court.

Aleksei Nikitovich Fedorin became a Jehovah's Witness in 1960. In 1929 he escaped death during the dekulakization of his parents. Later he became the leader of a combine and was awarded the Order of Red Labor Banner and medals "For excellent labor," "For labor distinction," "For development of Virgin Lands," etc. He has a certificate as a veteran of the armed forces.

When in the 1960s the KGB learned that Aleksei Nikitovich had professed the religion of Jehovah's Witnesses, they sought his dismissal from work. In 1971 he was forced to relocate from Omsk to Uzbekistan, although the KGB summoned him even there. The authorities considered his religious convictions "anti-soviet," and he was sentenced to five years in prison. The Hitlerian regime in Germany and the communist regime in USSR were the most active persecutors of Jehovah's Witnesses. Now this list has been extended by the current regime in Russia, the press service notes. (tr. by PDS, posted 1 August 2010)

Harassment of Jehovah's Witnesses

Jehovah's Witnesses detained and questioned in Kirov Province

Stetson University/ Religion News (27.07.2010) / HRWF (04.08.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - On 9 July representatives of the power structures visited a worship service in the Kingdom Hall of Jehovah's Witnesses in the city of Kirovo-Chepetsk of Kirov province, the SOVA information and analysis center reports, citing the press service of the Jehovah's Witnesses.

The inspectors viewed the premises, and after the meeting they detained all in attendance at the service and required them to produce identification documents. The believers' addresses and telephone numbers were recorded.

From 12 July to the present, around twenty believers have been summoned to give testimony to the investigator. The investigator asked, inter alia, about instances of distribution of religious literature. (tr. by PDS, posted 2 August 2010)

Siberian Pentecostals face soviet-like restriction

Supreme court of Khakasia leaves in force order to demolish Pentecostal pastor's house

Slavic Legal Center (08.07.2010) / HRWF (16.07.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - On 8 July 2010, the Supreme Court of the republic of Khakasia left in force the decision of a Saianogorsk court concerning demolition of the residence of the pastor of the "Glorification" Pentecostal church of Christians of Evangelical Faith, the press service of the Slavic Legal Center reports. Since the decision of the Saianogorsk city court has now taken effect, the defendant is obliged to remove the structure within two months; otherwise at the expiration of this period the structure will be demolished by force at the expense of the defendant.

We recall that on 11 March 2010 the Sainogorsk city court made a decision regarding the demolition of the building where the church was gathering for services (the congregation has about 300 persons) as an unauthorized structure. The law does not forbid religious associations to conduct services in residences. The two-story house was built as a home on a lot belonging to the pastor of the church, Sergei Vashchenko, and the church administrator, Vadim Osmukhin. The plaintiff in this case is a neighbor from the next lot, who also declared that the premises to which members of the church came supposedly presented a threat to the life and health of him and members of his family. During judicial hearings, representatives of the church acknowledged that the structure had been erected without receipt of the necessary permissions, but they claimed that they in no way violated the rights of its neighbor and, of course, they did not acknowledge a threat to life and health. However the court did not take account of these circumstances nor that worship services were conducted in the building nor the bias of the neighbor against the believers, but it just ordered that the structure be removed.

After an appeal of the decision of the city court, the case was reviewed by the Supreme Court of the republic of Khakasia. At first, as the administrator of the church, Vadim Osmukhin, reported to the Press Service of SLC, the Supreme Court received supplements submitted by the owners of the pastor's house. The issue was that in April 2010, Sergei Vashchenko and Vadim Osmukhin had already been able to provide as a supplement to their appeal relevant documents about the structure: a copy of the technical passport and evidence of state registration and a house log. However the Sainogorsk city court refused to attach these materials to the case. Despite the Supreme Court's receiving the documents about the building, they were not taken into any account in the process of review of the case. According to the church administrator, in essence not a single question was asked in the court. The defendants were asked whether the church gathered together in this building and whether it was a residence, and that was all.

In addition the court rejected a petition from representatives of the church requesting an expert analysis. As church administrator Vadim Osmukhin noted, an expert analysis submitted by the plaintiff was sewn with white threads and it drew the conclusions that the pastor's home represented a threat and violated city construction regulations on the basis of frankly absurd arguments. For example, at the beginning of the analysis it says that the building was built in accordance with all regulations, but at the same time it noted that in the event of an earthquake of a magnitude of 7 or higher it could be destroyed and damage neighboring buildings. As shortcomings, it pointed to the glass door and to the space between the pastor's home and the home of the neighbor, which is 15 meters, although according to all regulations it should be no less than 6 meters and 15 meters clearly is greater, etc.

The church administrator emphasized that in the course of constructing the building, representatives of the church experienced difficulties with offices of architecture, construction, and the land committee. In addition, as Vadim Osmukhin reported, a year ago the prosecutor's office wanted to initiate a process for demolishing the pastor's house as the plaintiff, but the court did not accept the prosecutor's application and then the prosecutor joined the case of the believers' neighbor himself.

For members of the church it is obvious that there is the influence of the local FSB in this case. According to believers, the local FSB put pressure on an employee of the Bureau of Technical Information because she "botched the affair" by registering the structure of "sectarians who get money from Americans."

Simultaneously with the review of the case in the Sainogorsk court, republican television showed reports directed against the church in which it was said that supposedly many residents of Sainogorsk who live in the vicinity of the protestant church were upset by the construction of a new building of the church and they were unhappy about the conduct of parishioners who disturbed their rest in their own houses.

According to the church administrator, all local attorneys know that the case against the "Glorification" church is a purely political affair where there is no material interest but there is ideological subtext.

In the contemporary republic of Khakasia, the history of the soviet persecutions of Pentecostals in Chernogorsk and Sainogorsk is essentially being repeated. As in the years of soviet repressions, the news media begin to create out of the Christian church a sinister image of a "sect," and to make citizens with equal rights—which believers should be—outcastes.

Pentecostal churches of Khakasia were subjected to harsh persecutions back in soviet times, when in the 1960s believers' children were taken away from them because they did not wish to be Young Pioneers and refused to sing soviet songs. Protestant families of Vashchenko and Chmykhalov from Chernogorsk, located close to Sainogorsk, acquired world fame when local authorities created unbearable conditions—services were disrupted, houses of worship were destroyed, and children were removed from the parents and placed in children's homes. As a result, in the spring of 1978 members of the Pentecostal families stormed the American embassy in Moscow, hoping that they and their fellow believers would be able to get permission for emigration. When attempts to persuade them to leave the embassy were ineffective, the Pentecostals were given a room in the basement where they lived in voluntary confinement for five years until they were permitted to go to USA in 1983. The current pastor of the "Glorification" church in Sainogorsk, Sergei Vashchenko, is a relative of those same Pentecostal emigrants who escaped the cruelty of soviet atheistic policy. The history of the Pentecostals from Khakasia who fled the repressions was published in the "Znamia" (2010, no. 7) magazine by Professor Lev Simkin under the title "Embassy Story." (tr. by PDS, posted 9 July 2010)

Russia Religion News Current News Items

Will Jehovah's Witness and Armenian-rite Catholic court victories be respected?

Geraldine Fagan

Forum 18 (12.07.2010) / HRWF (14.07.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Both the Jehovah's Witnesses and the Armenian-rite Catholic parish in Moscow have recently won legal victories in defence of their right to exist, Forum 18 News Service notes. The European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) in Strasbourg rejected allegations that the Jehovah's Witnesses destroy families and infringe the rights and freedoms of citizens and which were used to attempt to ban their community in Moscow. The ECtHR also found that the excessive length of court proceedings against the community violated the right to a fair trial. However the Jehovah's Witnesses have submitted another complaint to the ECtHR, this time against a Supreme Court ruling outlawing 34 Jehovah's Witness titles as extremist and dissolving their community in Taganrog. This paved the way for the current nationwide wave of raids, detentions, literature seizures and other violations of freedom of religion or belief against Jehovah's Witnesses. Separately, Armenian-rite Catholics won a case in Moscow against a city decision not to register their parish. The city Justice Department has appealed in Moscow against the judgment, but no date has yet been set for the appeal hearing.

As the Russian authorities continue to raid the homes and seize the literature of Jehovah's Witnesses, the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) in Strasbourg may be the community's only hope against such religious freedom violations, Forum 18 News Service notes.

On 1 June the Jehovah's Witnesses submitted a complaint to the ECtHR against the Russian Supreme Court's 8 December 2009 ruling, which upheld Rostov-on-Don Regional Court's earlier ruling outlawing 34 Jehovah's Witness titles as extremist and dissolving the local Jehovah's Witness religious organisation in Taganrog.

The Supreme Court ruling resulted in the addition of the 34 titles to the Federal List of Extremist Materials and paved the way for the current nationwide wave of raids, detentions, literature seizures and other violations against Jehovah's Witnesses, which is reminiscent of the latter Soviet era. Similar violations also take place against Muslims.

The latest, 1 June appeal to the ECtHR is the third case the Jehovah's Witnesses have brought against the Russian government, and came just before a 10 June victory in the first such case.

On 10 June 2010 the ECtHR ruled in favour of the Jehovah's Witnesses of Moscow in response to their October 2001 complaint against a ban on the community (Application No. 302/02

http://cmiskp.echr.coe.int/___tkp197/viewhbkm.asp?action=open&table=F69A27FD8FB86142BF01C1166DEA398649&key=82978&sessionId=56541383&skin=hudoc-en&attachment=true).

The ECtHR also awards the Jehovah's Witnesses non-financial damage of 20,000 Euros (781,500 Roubles, 160,870 Norwegian Kroner, or 25,280 US Dollars) plus costs of 50,000 Euros (1,953,200 Roubles, 402,225 Norwegian Kroner, or 63,200 US Dollars), to be paid by Russia. Both parties now have three months in which to appeal against the decision before it becomes final on 10 September. As of 12 July, Russia has not challenged the ECtHR judgment.

Will Russia comply?

Officials at the Justice Ministry in Moscow declined on 11 June to put Forum 18 through to the office within the Ministry of Georgi Matyushkin, Russia's Permanent Representative to the European Court, insisting that any questions should be put in writing. Forum 18 asked Matyushkin in writing the same day whether Russia intends to challenge or comply with the 10 June judgment in favour of the Jehovah's Witnesses, including by registering their Moscow community. Forum 18 had received no response as of the end of the working day in Moscow on 12 July.

Officials at the Moscow Justice Department similarly declined to answer telephone enquiries. On 16 June Forum 18 asked the Justice Department head, Vladimir Demidov, in writing whether his department will now register the Jehovah's Witness Moscow community in the light of the ECtHR judgment, as well as the Moscow parish of the Armenian-rite Catholics, which won a case in a Moscow court in early June against the Department's refusal to consider its registration application. Forum 18 had received no response as of the end of the working day in Moscow on 12 July.

The Russian government has not challenged previous ECtHR judgments in favour of its religious communities – including the Jehovah's Witnesses. It has paid compensation on time, and in the one case where a clear remedy was possible for the circumstances generating the complaint – that of the Salvation Army's Moscow branch – this was applied in the form of re-registration of the branch by the city's Justice Department.

Neither the Armenian-rite Catholics nor the Salvation Army are experiencing other problems from the authorities.

Armenian-rite Catholic victory?

On 7 June, Moscow Justice Department's failure to consider an October 2009 registration application by the Armenian-rite Catholic parish of St Gregory the Illuminator was pronounced unlawful by Meshchansky District Court in the Russian capital. The Department had declined to consider the application on the grounds that it did not contain a document proving that the community had existed for 15 years, as required by the 1997 Law, but Vladimir Ryakhovsky of the Slavic Centre for Law and Justice, the parish's lawyer, demonstrated that such documentation was submitted.

Immediately after the judgment was given, the Moscow Justice Department indicated it would appeal against it, Ryakhovsky told Forum 18 on 12 July. It submitted its appeal to Moscow City Court in early July once it had received the 7 June decision in writing. No date has yet been set for the appeal hearing.

Ryakhovsky said the decision to appeal was probably based on the Justice Department's "formal approach". But he said he does not know why it refused to consider the original application. The parish remains unregistered.

The Armenian-rite parish is separate from the structures of Moscow's Roman Catholic diocese and is subject to the Armenian Catholic bishop based in Armenia. The lack of legal status has not prevented a priest from gaining visas to serve the Moscow parish from some years before the time the original application was lodged.

Spirit of ECtHR rulings defied

Russia continues to defy the spirit of the ECtHR rulings in favour of its religious communities. In one of over 265 incidents of state harassment reported by the Jehovah's Witnesses over six months since the Supreme Court's December 2009 ruling, police searched Jehovah's Witness homes and the Kingdom Hall in Chelyabinsk in sanctioned raids on 12 May. Ironically, by confiscating special video equipment at the Hall, the authorities again paralysed the activity of the very same community of deaf Jehovah's Witnesses awarded compensation by the ECtHR in January 2007 for the state interruption of their worship service in April 2000, the second case brought by the Jehovah's Witnesses before the ECtHR. A 14 May 2010 statement by the Chelyabinsk regional department of the Interior Ministry acknowledges searches of nine homes of active Jehovah's Witnesses and "premises where adepts hold meetings", involving confiscation of literature, video equipment, computers, mobile telephones, and audio and video storage devices. A criminal case has been opened against the Jehovah's Witnesses, it continues, due to the recent arrival from St Petersburg of a large consignment of "extremist literature, audio and video products". The statement also – mistakenly – alleges that Jehovah's Witness activity is "completely banned in some European countries".

A separate, 13 May statement by the Investigation Committee of Chelyabinsk Regional Public Prosecutor's Office adds that the case was opened under Article 282, Part 2, Point C of the Criminal Code (incitement of ethnic, racial or religious hatred by an organised group), which it claims was violated by statements made during Jehovah's Witness public preaching during 2009-10, and distribution of "banned literature".

Muted protests

While some parts of the state apparatus have condemned the current action against the Jehovah's Witnesses, their protest has been minimal and had little effect. As Grigory Martynov of the Jehovah's Witnesses told Forum 18 on 2 June, even high-level state representatives say they are unable to act, citing the need to comply with court decisions.

At a 2 June Moscow press conference organised by the Jehovah's Witnesses, Sergei Krivenko of the presidential Committee for the Development of Institutions of Civil Society announced that his Committee was preparing a complaint to the Constitutional Court against the 2002 Extremism Law being interpreted as in the case of the Jehovah's Witnesses. He repeatedly described what was happening to them as "inadmissible" – yet the campaign against them continues.

In a 24 June interview with Russian daily Kommersant, Russia's Ombudsperson for Human Rights, Vladimir Lukin, announced that on 22 June he asked the presidium of the Supreme Court to review Rostov-on-Don Regional Court's 11 September 2009 decision against the Jehovah's Witnesses.

In the interview, Lukin also claimed that his defence of freedom of conscience in Russia was "without division between traditional and non-traditional religions or sects". Yet while noting frequent complaints from Jehovah's Witnesses in various regions, the freedom of conscience section of the Ombudsperson's 21 May 2010 report on human rights violations in Russia in 2009 fails to mention the Rostov-on-Don or Supreme Court rulings. Instead – in sharp contrast to the latest ECtHR ruling – it recommends the Jehovah's Witnesses change their stance on blood transfusions.

In its overall assessment, the freedom of conscience section of the 2010 Ombudsman's report also echoes President Dmitry Medvedev's December 2009 suggestion to Lukin that a

rise in complaints was "not bad" because it suggested that citizens had faith that they would be resolved. Such a rise "testifies to citizens' increased interest in and attention to these issues," the report maintains.

Moscow JW community victory

The original grounds for the complaint considered in the ECtHR's 10 June judgment were repeated and protracted attempts to prosecute the Moscow Jehovah's Witnesses – five criminal investigations and two civil proceedings over some six years at the time of submission in October 2001 - and the corresponding refusal by Moscow's Justice Department to re-register the community under the 1997 Religion Law. The complaint was later amplified to take account of the verdict in the second civil case: the dissolution of the Moscow community and a ban on its activities, reached by the city's Golovinsky District Court on 26 March 2004 and upheld by Moscow City Court on 16 June 2004.

In their complaint, the Jehovah's Witnesses argued that the state's action against them violated Articles 9 (freedom of thought, conscience and religion) and 11 (freedom of peaceful assembly and association) of the Council of Europe's Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, which entered force for Russia in 1998. They point to the 2004 ban's numerous adverse effects on the Moscow community, such as being prevented from constructing or renting places of worship and from acquiring, importing and disseminating religious literature.

In its submission to the ECtHR, the Russian government defended the ban on the Moscow Jehovah's Witnesses, maintaining that the community's "salient theocratic hierarchy", "mindless submission" of individual members, aspiration to integrate families into the life of a "totalitarian non-secular collective" and "paramilitary discipline" set it apart from unspecified "traditional religions".

The rights enshrined in Articles 9 and 11 of the Convention are not absolute, but restrictions must both be prescribed by law and "necessary in a democratic society in the interests of public safety, for the protection of public order, health or morals, or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others." Since the Jehovah's Witness ban is based on Article 14 of the 1997 Law, the ECtHR states in its 41-page verdict that it is prepared to accept that it is prescribed by law and "pursued the legitimate aim of the protection of health and the rights of others."

However, the ECtHR found on examination of the Russian state's key charges against the Jehovah's Witnesses – coercion into destroying the family; infringement of the personality, rights and freedoms of citizens; encouragement of suicide or the refusal of medical assistance; and incitement of citizens to refuse civic duties – that they had no basis whatsoever. It therefore determined the ban unnecessary and upheld the Jehovah's Witnesses' complaint, awarding the combined 70,000 Euros in non-pecuniary damage and costs. In addition, the ECtHR has ordered the Russian government to "put an end to the violation found by the Court and to redress so far as possible the effects".

Landmark decision

The ECtHR's argumentation in rejecting the specific charges against the Jehovah's Witnesses is particularly significant, as similar accusations form the basis of the September 2009 Rostov-on-Don Regional Court ruling. In its verdict, the Rostov-on-Don court accepted allegations that the Taganrog Jehovah's Witnesses destroy families and infringe the rights and freedoms of citizens among its grounds for dissolving the community. It also accepted

as evidence of extremism references in Jehovah's Witness literature to rejection of blood transfusions, military service, state symbols and holidays.

By contrast, rejecting the charge of coercion into destroying the family in the Moscow case, the ECtHR stated:

"It further appears from the testimonies by witnesses that what was taken by the Russian courts to constitute 'coercion into destroying the family' was the frustration that non-Witness family members experienced as a consequence of disagreements over the manner in which their Witness relatives decided to organise their lives in accordance with the religious precepts, and their increasing isolation resulting from having been left outside the life of the community to which their Witness relatives adhered. It is a known fact that a religious way of life requires from its followers both abidance by religious rules and self-dedication to religious work that can take up a significant portion of the believer's time and sometimes assume such extreme forms as monasticism, which is common to many Christian denominations and, to a lesser extent, also to Buddhism and Hinduism. Nevertheless, as long as self-dedication to religious matters is the product of the believer's independent and free decision and however unhappy his or her family members may be about that decision, the ensuing estrangement cannot be taken to mean that the religion caused the break-up in the family."

Rejecting the charge of infringement of the personality, rights and freedoms of citizens, the ECtHR stated:

"The Court finds it remarkable that the courts did not cite the name of a single individual whose right to freedom of conscience had allegedly been violated (..) Nor is it apparent that the prosecution experts had interviewed anyone who had been coerced (..) into joining the community. On the contrary, the individual applicants and other members of the applicant community testified before the court that they had made a voluntary and conscious choice of their religion and, having accepted the faith of Jehovah's Witnesses, followed its doctrines of their own free will."

Rejecting the charge of encouragement of suicide or the refusal of medical assistance, the ECtHR stated:

"The ability to conduct one's life in a manner of one's own choosing includes the opportunity to pursue activities perceived to be of a physically harmful or dangerous nature for the individual concerned." Noting that the right to refuse medical treatment is also protected by Russian law, the Court continued that the freedom to make such a choice "is vital to the principles of self-determination and personal autonomy. A competent adult patient is free to decide, for instance, whether or not to undergo surgery or treatment or, by the same token, to have a blood transfusion. However, for this freedom to be meaningful, patients must have the right to make choices that accord with their own views and values, regardless of how irrational, unwise or imprudent such choices may appear to others. Many established jurisdictions have examined the cases of Jehovah's Witnesses who had refused a blood transfusion and found that, although the public interest in preserving the life or health of a patient was undoubtedly legitimate and very strong, it had to yield to the patient's stronger interest in directing the course of his or her own life."

Rejecting the charge of incitement of citizens to refuse civic duties, the ECtHR stated:

"The religious admonishment to refuse military service was in full compliance with Russian laws and no instances of any applicant community's members unlawfully refusing alternative

civilian service were put forward in the community trial (..) Russian law does not contain regulations on the civil duty of honouring such [state] symbols (..) there is no law compelling celebration of any holidays, whether they are secular or religious, and such compulsory participation in celebrations, had it been elevated to the rank of a legal obligation, could arguably have raised an issue under Articles 9 and 10 of the Convention."

The ECtHR also accepted that the approximately five and a half years of legal proceedings by the Russian authorities within Russia against the community were excessive. The length of these legal proceedings was found by the ECtHR to break Article 6 (the right to a fair trial), Paragraph 1 of the Convention.

Orthodox clergy get bureaucrats to restrict Pentecostals

Attorney of Slavic Legal Center blames religious competition

Interview with Attorney Inna Zabrebina by Roman Lunkin

Slavic Legal Center (06.07.2010) / HRWF (09.07.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Inna Vladimirovna, the administration of the Sholokhov district of Rostov province refused to grant permission for construction of a house of worship to the "Christ the Savior" church of Christians of Evangelical Faith, Pentecostals, in the native land of [novelist Mikhail] Sholokhov, in the Cossack village of Veshenskaia on the basis of an appeal from a group of Orthodox citizens led by the dean, Archpriest Vladimir Poliakov. Moreover, Oleg Delnov appended to the appeal of the Orthodox citizens the following resolution (also dated 17 June 2010): "To V.P. Zubkov. We ask that you prepare a negative response to the applicants initiating the construction." On 23 June the church received the refusal to issue a permit for construction over the signature of the chief architect of Sholokhov district, V.P. Zubkov, because of the public outcry. What is your comment about the situation that has developed? Why are the actions of the authorities illegal?

No doubt, representatives of local government should pay attention to the opinion of residents of the district and heed it. However, in their actions bureaucrats still must be guided by the law. The issue is that in accordance with points 3 and 11 of article 51 of the Construction Code of RF, the agency of local administration authorized to issue permits, in the event of a refusal, must, within ten days after receiving an application for granting permission for construction, indicate the reasons for the refusal. The refusal must be legislatively based. However, the "high public outcry" expressed by the approximately 20 signatures of representatives of another religion not only cannot serve as a legislatively based reason for refusal, but it also violates the legislation of the Russian federation.

It is not clear why the administration of the district heeded these 20 Orthodox citizens, while in the Cossack village of Veshenskaia there are around 10,000 residents.

There have never been any complaints against the "Christ the Savior" church of Christians of Evangelical Faith, the land has been prepared in the required form, the parcel of land is the legal property of the KhVE church, and it was purchased for the construction of a house of worship.

In accordance with point 2, article 40, of the Land Code of RF, the owners of a lot have the right to erect residential, industrial, cultural, recreational, and other buildings or structures

constructed in accordance with the purpose of the land and its permitted use, while observing the requirements of construction regulations, structural, ecological, sanitary and hygienic, fire protection and other rules and regulations.

Why, in your opinion, did the authorities so lightly oblige the authors of the appeal against Christians who are of another confession and agree with the head of the Veshenskaia deanery, Fr Vladimir Poliakov, that "we do not need more churches"?

In this case, in violation of those requirements of the legislation, the decision to refuse the church permission to construct a house of worship was made in favor of another religious organization that thought that the church may provide it competition on the religious field.

In addition, the appeal signed, inter alia, by an Orthodox priest, was written in a confrontational tone, offensive to the protestant Pentecostal church which allegedly "corrupts people morally" although the Pentecostals adhere to the same biblical moral principles that Orthodox believers adhere to.

Which provisions of Russian legislation have been violated by representatives of the administration of the Sholokhov district in this particular conflict situation?

The local bureaucrats violated fundamental standards of the legislation of the Russian federation, to say nothing of the ethical aspects of the case.

In accordance with part 2 of article 14 of the constitution of RF, religious associations are separated from the state and equal before the law.

Article 28 of the constitution of RF guarantees freedom of conscience and freedom of religious confession, including the right to profess any religion.

According to article 19, the state guarantees the equality of rights without respect to religious affiliation.

In accordance with point 3, article 3 of the federal law of 26 September 1997 "On freedom of conscience and religious associations," the establishment of privileges, restrictions, or any other forms of discrimination on the basis of religious affiliation is not permitted.

In accordance with point 1, article 16, of this law, religious organizations have the right to build and maintain houses of worship and furnishings.

According to points 11 and 1 of article 11 of the federal law of 8 January 1998 "On bases of municipal service in the Russian federation" a municipal employee does not have the right to use his office in the favor of, inter alia, religious associations.

All of these provisions are rather frequently violated by bureaucrats, or ignored by them, and possibly some do not even know that their actions are gross violations of the law.

Is it possible that the business of the European Court for Human Rights in Strasbourg might have added to it yet another complaint from Russia? How can the experience of the Strasbourg court help in this case?

The European Court for Human Rights in this category has frequently ruled that the autonomy of a state's making decisions must be premised on the principle of guaranteeing

religious pluralism essential to any democratic society, and the procedure of granting permission must not violate the rights of applicants in the area of freedom of religion.

In the Cossack village of Veshenskaia the rights of the Pentecostal congregation have been violated so crudely and overtly that the obstinacy of the local authorities in resisting believers quite well could become yet another legal disgrace for our country in the international arena.

What are the prospects for a review of this case in court?

Oh, of course, the KhVE church will submit a request that the decision to refuse to issue permission for construction be ruled illegal. The decision of the administration of the Sholokhov district must be found illegal and the administration of the Sholokhov district of Rostov province will be obliged to issue the appropriate permits to the believers and not persecute a Christian church in such a famous village in the homeland of Sholokhov, even if it is not Orthodox. (tr. by PDS, posted 6 July 2010)

Institute of Freedom of Conscience warns of prejudice in teacher training

Future Moscow teachers learn religious xenophobia

Stetson University/ Russia Religion News (02.07.2010) / HRWF (06.07.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Students of the Moscow City Pedagogical University are being taught that charismatic churches, Jehovah's Witnesses, "The International Society of Krishna Consciousness" and other religious associations are "sects," a Portal-credo.ru correspondent reports.

The syllabus of the course on history of world religious for undergraduate students of the History Faculty of the Moscow City Pedagogical University (V.V. Riabov, rector) includes an arbitrary classification of "sects" that applies to contemporary so-called "nontraditional cults." The author of the syllabus, senior teacher of the department of world history of MGPU, Konstantin Zakharov, suggests that students study the following classification of "cults": "syncretistic and eclectic sects," "pseudo-biblical sects," "pseudo-Hindu sects," "neopaganism and nativist sects," "psycho-cults," etc. The word "sect" is not placed within quotation marks in the syllabus. Within the category of these organizations the author includes charismatic churches, identified in the syllabus as "charismatics," "The Moon Unification Church," "Children of Jesus," Jehovah's Witnesses, "International Society of Krishna Consciousness," "New Age," and other religious associations.

In the opinion of representatives of the Institute of Freedom of Conscience and many other famous scholars of religion, the use of terms incorrectly, from a scientific and legal point of view, with respect to religious associations is the language of hostility and religious xenophobia; it incites strife and intolerance, engenders conflicts, contradicts the Federal Program for Promotion of the Framework of Tolerant Consciousness and the program of toleration of the government of Moscow, and threatens interconfessional peace and the integrity of the Russian state. (tr. by PDS, posted 2 July 2010)

Jehovah's Witnesses of Moscow v. Russia

10.06.2010

Press release issued by the Registrar

Chamber judgment1[1]

Jehovah's Witnesses of Moscow v. Russia (application no. 302/02)

UNJUSTIFIED DISSOLUTION AND REFUSAL TO RE-REGISTER THE JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY IN MOSCOW

Unanimously:

Violation of Article 9 (freedom of thought, conscience and religion)
Violation of Article 11 (freedom of assembly and association)
Violation of Article 6 § 1 (right to a fair trial within a reasonable time)
of the European Convention on Human Rights

Principal facts

The applicants are the religious community of Jehovah's Witnesses of Moscow ("the applicant community"), established in 1992, and four individuals who are members of that community and live in Moscow.

Jehovah's Witnesses have been present in Russia since 1891. They were banned after the Russian Revolution in 1917 and persecuted in the Soviet Union. After the adoption of the 1990 law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organisations, the applicant community, which is the Moscow branch of the Jehovah's Witnesses, obtained legal-entity status in December 1993 from the Moscow City Justice Department. According to its charter, its purpose was the "joint profession and dissemination of their faith and carrying on religious activity to proclaim the name of God the Jehovah".

Starting in 1995, a non-governmental organisation aligned with the Russian Orthodox Church and called "the Salvation Committee" complained five times of the applicant community's management before the district prosecution office. As a result, criminal investigations were opened and subsequently discontinued upon the recommendation of an investigator to bring a civil action against the applicant community seeking its dissolution and the banning of its activities. In April 1998, the prosecutor brought a civil action to that effect. The relevant district court, having heard over forty witnesses and experts and examined religious literature and documents, found the complaints unfounded. Upon an appeal by the prosecutor, the case was remitted for a fresh examination by a different composition of the court.

In the meantime, a new Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations ("the Religious Act") entered into force in October 1997. It required all religious associations that had previously been granted legal-entity status to bring their articles of association into conformity with that Act and to obtain re-registration from the competent justice department. Between 20 October 1999 and 12 January 2001 the applicant community

applied for re-registration five times, unsuccessfully. In August 2002, the competent domestic court held that the Moscow Justice Department's refusals were unlawful but did not order re-registration referring to the need for the applicants to submit a fresh application for re-registration as the documents' form had changed in the meantime.

A new round of the 1998 civil proceedings against the applicant community ended in March 2004 with a court decision ordering its dissolution and imposing a permanent ban on its activities. The court found the applicant community responsible for, among other things, luring minors into religious associations against their will and without the consent of their parents; coercing believers into destroying the family; infringing the personality, rights and freedoms of citizens; inflicting harm on the health of citizens; encouraging suicide or refusing on religious grounds medical assistance to persons in life- or health-threatening conditions; and inciting citizens to refuse to fulfil their civil duties. The applicant community was ordered to bear the costs of the expert studies used in the proceedings and to pay costs of 102,000 Russian roubles to the State. Their appeal was dismissed.

Complaints, procedure and composition of the Court

Relying on Articles 9, 11 and 14 (prohibition of discrimination), the applicants complained about the dissolution of the community and the banning of its activities, and about the refusal of the Russian authorities to re-register their organisation. Relying further on Article 6, they also complain of the excessively long dissolution proceedings.

The application was lodged with the Court on 26 October 2001.

Judgment was given by a Chamber of seven judges, composed as follows:

Christos **Rozakis** (Greece), **President**,
Nina **Vajić** (Croatia),
Anatoly **Kovler** (Russia),
Khanlar **Hajiyev** (Azerbaijan),
Dean **Spielmann** (Luxembourg),
Sverre Erik **Jebens** (Norway),
George **Nicolaou** (Cyprus), **judges**,

and Søren **Nielsen**, **Section Registrar**.

Decision of the Court

Dissolution of the applicant community (Article 9 in the light of Article 11)

The Court recalled its settled case law in which it had held that freedom of thought, conscience and religion was one of the foundations of a democratic society. It was also one of the most vital elements for the identity of believers but also a precious asset for the atheists, agnostics, sceptics and the unconcerned. The pluralism, dearly won over the centuries and not dissociable from a democratic society, depended on it.

The decision of the Russian courts to dissolve the applicant community and to ban its activities had resulted in its inability to exercise its right to own or rent property, to maintain bank accounts, to hire employees and to ensure judicial protection of the community, its members and its assets. That decision had been based on the Religious Act and had pursued

the legitimate aim of the protection of health and the rights of others in accordance with Articles 9 and 11.

However, having examined in detail the arguments of the Russian authorities, including the domestic courts, the Court found that the decision on the applicant community's dissolution had not rested on an appropriate factual basis. In particular, the domestic courts had not adduced relevant and sufficient reasons to show that the applicant community had forced families to break up, that it had infringed the rights and freedoms of its members or third parties, that it had incited its followers to commit suicide or refuse medical care, that it had impinged on the rights of non-Witness parents or their children, or that it had encouraged members to refuse to fulfil any duties established by law. The limitations imposed by the applicant community on its members, such as the expectation to pray, preach door-to-door and the regulation of their leisurely activities, had not differed fundamentally from similar limitations imposed by other religions on their followers' private lives. In addition, the domestic courts' conclusion that coercion had been used to force members to join the community had been made without any evidence for it. As regards the fact that the applicant community had preached the abstaining from blood transfusions, even in life-threatening situations, that had been insufficient to trigger such a far-reaching measure as the ban on its activities since Russian law had granted patients the freedom of choice concerning the medical treatment to undergo.

Consequently, the dissolution of the community had been an excessively severe and disproportionate sanction compared to the legitimate aim pursued by the authorities. There had accordingly been a violation of Article 9 of the Convention, read in the light of Article 11.

Refusals to re-register the applicant community (Article 11 in the light of Article 9)

The Court noted that the ability to establish a legal entity is one of the most important aspects of freedom of association without which that right would be deprived of meaning. The applicant community had existed and operated lawfully in Russia since 1992. Following the adoption of the 1997 Religious Act, several applications for re-registration filed by the applicant community had been rejected, which had had the effect of barring the possibility of filing further applications for re-registration. The Moscow Justice Department had acted arbitrarily having consistently omitted to specify why it deemed the applications incomplete. The Court further noted that while the Religions Act had not made re-registration conditional on the use of specific forms, the applicant community had nonetheless been requested to resubmit its re-registration request using new forms. It had done that in its fifth and final application, which had also been rejected. No reference had been made by the authorities, however, to the specific legal provisions which could have been used by the applicant community in order to resubmit an application for re-registration after the expiry of the time-limit allowed by law on 31 December 2000.

The Court concluded that in denying re-registration to the Jehovah's Witnesses of Moscow, the Moscow authorities had not acted in good faith and had neglected their duty of neutrality and impartiality *vis-à-vis* the applicant community.

There had therefore been a violation of Article 11 of the Convention read in the light of Article 9.

Excessive length of dissolution proceedings (Article 6)

The Court noted that the applicant community's actions or inaction had caused a delay of about six months to those proceedings. However, the authorities had been accountable for

approximately five and a half years of the duration of the proceedings. Given that States had the duty to organise their judicial system in a way so that courts could decide cases within a reasonable time, the Court found that the length in the dissolution proceedings had been excessive, in violation of Article 6 § 1.

The Court found no reason to examine separately the applicant community's complaints under Article 14 and rejected all other complaints.

Just satisfaction (Article 41)

The Court held that Russia had to pay to the applicants jointly 20,000 euros (EUR) in respect of non-pecuniary damage and EUR 50,000 for costs and expenses.

(The judgment is available only in English.)

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

¹[1]Under Article 43 of the Convention, within three months from the date of a Chamber judgment, any party to the case may, in exceptional cases, request that the case be referred to the 17-member Grand Chamber of the Court. In that event, a panel of five judges considers whether the case raises a serious question affecting the interpretation or application of the Convention or its protocols, or a serious issue of general importance, in which case the Grand Chamber will deliver a final judgment. If no such question or issue arises, the panel will reject the request, at which point the judgment becomes final. Otherwise Chamber judgments become final on the expiry of the three-month period or earlier if the parties declare that they do not intend to make a request to refer.

All final judgments are transmitted to the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe for supervision of their execution. Further information about the execution process can be found here: www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/execution.

Ghostlike existence for Dagestan's protestants

By Geraldine Fagan,

Forum 18 (07.06.2010) / HRWF (15.06.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Dagestan's largest Pentecostal church is now barred from conducting social projects with even drug addicts and convicts, its pastors have told Forum 18 News Service in the southern Russian republic. A five-year-old agreement granting prison visits stopped without explanation in early 2010, notes Pastor Artur Suleimanov of the church's parent Hosanna congregation, "even though prison governors were glad to receive our people." The authorities' positive attitude towards the church's anti-drugs work in the early 2000s has also changed abruptly, he said. "It's very strange, as in practice we are the only people working with drug addicts - sometimes you get the impression that the state anti-drugs agency is a very real drugs baron."

Asked if there were any restriction on Protestant activity in the social sphere, Rasul Gadzhiyev, departmental head of Dagestan's Ministry for Nationality Policy, Information and External Affairs, maintained that the state authorities do not regulate it or issue special instructions. "If the Protestants' activity is in line with the law, there are no problems at all," he told Forum 18 in the Dagestani capital Makhachkala on 22 April.

Dagestan - a republic in Russia's troubled North Caucasus which borders Azerbaijan and Georgia - is highly ethnically diverse. Most of the population is of Muslim background, the majority of them Sunnis but with a Shia minority. Suleimanov - who is an ethnic Avar - estimates that some 85 per cent of the approximately 3,000 Pentecostals in Dagestan belong to local ethnicities.

Christian churches in Dagestan known for working among ethnic Slavs - including the Russian Orthodox and the Baptists - are unlikely to face state and public opposition. The long-standing Jewish population in and around the southern city of Derbent - estimated by local Pentecostal Pastor Sergei Shakhov at 3,000 - does not face hostility from non-Jews.

Dagestan's authorities also impose restrictions on the religious freedom of Muslims outside the framework of the state-backed Spiritual Directorate of Muslims of Dagestan, including in the areas of religious literature and education. However, the authorities are beginning to relax their strict control on Muslim public life.

Change of attitude

An ethnic Russian, Pastor Ruslan Kornev of Hosanna's daughter Source of Life congregation in Kaspiisk, a port just south of Makhachkala, estimated that Dagestan's authorities switched their attitude towards the Pentecostals' work with drug addicts in the republic around three years ago. "We were very active until 2005 - we did hundreds of music concerts - but then relations became more distant," he explained to Forum 18 on 22 April. "Of course, to our faces every official said 'we completely sympathise with you', 'we are willing', 'we would like to'."

The church then spent several years trying to prove itself, he said. "But then I understood that life's too short - and we decided to work just as individual believers." By closing its separate charitable organisation, Lazarus, in 2007, the church was able to save effort spent on extensive bureaucracy and bookkeeping - in any case liable to frequent state check-ups, Kornev told Forum 18. Scepticism continues to be a common response to even personal charity, however: "People would understand if I were doing this because I need money or some kind of personal glory, but they don't understand that I only need to give glory to God."

Both Suleimanov and Kornev thought the problems were due to individual officials. "The legal authorities have a quite good and correct attitude towards us," Suleimanov remarked to Forum 18 on 16 April. "If there's pressure, it's the personal initiative of an official or law enforcement agent - 'You're x, we're Muslims, you're doing x wrong.' But it's fine if you respond on the basis of the law."

Societal pressure

All three Pentecostal pastors with whom Forum 18 spoke reported that their congregations' lack of freedom was overwhelmingly due to public attitudes, which prevent some church members from attending Sunday worship even at the openly functioning churches in urban locations. Pastor Kornev said that in Kaspiisk church members who do not attend worship are mostly young people or wives whose husbands are opposed, "and we don't want them to be in conflict".

In Makhachkala, Hosanna has been able to meet at a commercial building it purchased in 2000, but was previously able to rent only due to his friendship with the landlord of a local social club who resisted community pressure to evict the church, Pastor Suleimanov told Forum 18.

In Derbent, local proprietors are afraid to rent to Pentecostals for fear of pressure from the Muslim community, Pastor Shakhov (an ethnic Russian) of Hosanna's daughter Vineyard congregation told Forum 18 there on 17 April.

Clandestine communities

When Pentecostals gather in a village, however, "it is almost on the level of a whisper", Pastor Suleimanov told Forum 18. The members of the two house churches to which Pastor Shakhov ministers are mostly women, who sometimes cannot attend worship for fear of alerting their husbands. One group at first included some men, but they left due to very strong pressure from the village community, he said.

Pastor Suleimanov explained to Forum 18 that, due to strong family ties and public opinion, people who become Christian are often cast out of the community. Often, they are first attracted to Christianity after coming to Christians for physical healing "as they know that the Prophet Isa [Jesus] healed people and then they want to know more."

There is little reaction if the community perceives Pentecostals simply as followers of Isa's teaching, Suleimanov continued. But if they are identified as Christian, this is commonly associated with either Russian Orthodoxy or the West - which has negative connotations of the Iraq War or Hollywood culture - and conflict arises. "The whole village thinks that if they have a Christian among them, that means he is kafr [an unbeliever] and so unclean. They worry that this curse could extend to the whole village and blame all misfortune on this person."

Asked whether this attitude was shared by the village authorities, Pastor Suleimanov replied: "Well, the police are the very same neighbours and the very same Muslims." He recalled visiting a village house group some two years ago and being detained by police while preaching: "When the church elder pointed out that our activity was lawful, the chief police officer pointed to the mosque and said: 'That's my law'."

This situation has not changed since Hosanna was founded in 1994, said Pastor Suleimanov: "All these 17 years it's been like the ninth month of pregnancy - carrying a burden which is never resolved."

Conditions are the same all over Dagestan except for the more open capital, he said. Still, there are periods when Pastor Suleimanov receives threats even in Makhachkala: "For the past three months I haven't answered the phone at night, as I know it will be some kind of verbal abuse or threat."

Pastor Suleimanov does not believe that highlighting particular problems will bring results, however, particularly for village house churches. "How can it help? It doesn't help at all," he maintained to Forum 18. "People have to live there, their roots and families are there. You can't influence situations like these by any official means whatsoever. Sometimes - in very concrete circumstances, if a person is being oppressed or harassed or is in prison - we can fight for him. But if you drag him out of that place he'll never live there again."

Neighbouring republics

Senior representative in the North Caucasus for the Russia-wide Pentecostal Union headed by Bishop Eduard Grabovenko, Pastor Suleimanov nevertheless favourably contrasted the situation in Dagestan with that of the nearest traditionally Muslim republics. "Here there is some kind of democracy and secularity at least," he told Forum 18, "in Chechnya and Ingushetia it's quite different - there are no open [Pentecostal] churches." Describing the situation in Chechnya as "dictatorship", he estimated there to be around 100 Pentecostals, but no organised congregation.

Pastor Suleimanov had no figure for Ingushetia, where he said clan influence is particularly strong: "I know Ingush believers who came to faith via the internet or other means, but they can't take any independent steps, especially if they are young," he told Forum 18. "Even if they leave, it's death for them, as they will be tracked down anyway."

Dagestan's religious freedom policy changing?

By Geraldine Fagan,

Forum 18 (03.06.2010) / HRWF (15.06.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - While Dagestan's Islamist insurgents have stepped up their attacks in recent months - conducting major suicide bombings in both Moscow and the republic itself - the local state authorities are beginning to relax their strict control on Muslim public life, Forum 18 News Service has found. Some local commentators think the authorities have realised that harsh restrictions on the religious freedom of Muslims outside the framework of the state-backed Spiritual Directorate of Muslims of Dagestan have proved futile and counter-productive.

Under current law the Spiritual Directorate has a monopoly of all Muslim life in Dagestan, including on religious literature distribution and education. Although this control is not always enforced in practice, it has reduced the availability both of non-approved Islamic literature and of Islamic religious education.

Dagestan - a republic in Russia's troubled North Caucasus which borders Azerbaijan and Georgia - is highly ethnically diverse. Most of the population is of Muslim background, the majority of them Sunnis but with a Shia minority.

Thaw in Dagestan?

A sign of a thaw, local journalist Abdulmumin Gadzhiyev believes, is the fact that he has been able to write freely on Islamic affairs in Dagestan's popular independent Russian-language newspaper Chernovik for the past 18 months. "Earlier this would not have been considered OK," he told Forum 18 in the capital Makhachkala on 15 April. "It was one thing if the subject matter was ritual, but another if it touched on politics. But now that's appearing, and not just in Chernovik."

Writing in Chernovik in August 2008, for example, Gadzhiyev criticises Dagestan's criminalisation of so-called Wahhabis: "Today a Muslim is forbidden what is permitted a communist, for example – to have an opinion on forms of government. And in order to become a 'Wahhabi extremist' (..) you don't even need to commit a crime. It's enough to express the desire to live in a sharia state. Which follows absolutely naturally from a belief in the infallibility of the Book of Allah and His prophet (peace be upon him)."

In Dagestan Forum 18 found that Salafis - advocates of what they regard as a pure form of Islam as practised by the earliest Muslims – are often referred to as Wahhabis regardless of whether they reject violence. Critics of the republic's September 1999 Law outlawing Wahhabism – which it defines only as an "extremist trend" – say it contributed to the hounding of peaceful Salafi Muslims and indirectly stoked Dagestan's insurgency.

Persecution passed?

A Makhachala-based lawyer working with the Russian human rights organisation Memorial, Ziyautdin Uvaisov estimated to Forum 18 on 15 April that the peak of arbitrary state harassment of Muslims was approximately five years ago, when "OMON [special police] would surround the mosque on Fridays, detain, photograph and fingerprint the people there." In some parts of Dagestan people might still come under suspicion for promoting Islam very actively, he thought, or even for not drinking alcohol.

This view was echoed by Shamil Shikhaliyev, head of the Oriental Manuscripts Department at the Institute of History, Archaeology and Ethnography of the Dagestan branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences. Improvements began under republican President Mukhu Aliyev (2006-10), he told Forum 18 on 16 April. "It's not like in the early 2000s, when you'd be targeted for having a beard. Salafis are now noting that torture is not indiscriminate in the way it was before – there are still individual cases and abductions, forced confessions, but it's more likely the people were actually involved in militant activity."

In the southern city of Derbent, Salafi brothers Abumuslim and Magomed Shafiyev had heard that the situation for Muslims was becoming freer in Makhachkala, but maintained Derbent had not changed. Speaking to Forum 18 on 17 April, they were sceptical about the long-lasting impact of any new approach: "It's just temporary, a break (..) they can't stop this mechanism once it's started."

Futile policy

The state's shift in approach appears to come from a realisation that giving only the current Spiritual Directorate of Muslims of Dagestan legitimacy while criminalising other Muslims is an ineffective tactic in curbing radicalism. "If the authorities sought to eradicate extremist sentiments by placing their stake on the Directorate and using it in their ideological struggle, they are now beginning to understand that there were no grounds for doing so and are

forging other contacts," local journalist Gadzhiyev remarked to Forum 18. "They have no other option."

"The authorities are beginning to understand that they can't keep raiding everywhere and trying to control things in that way, that constant pressure doesn't make people regard them positively," human rights lawyer Uvaisov told Forum 18. "Physical elimination doesn't go anywhere," Shikhaliyev of the Dagestan branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences agreed, "we've been destroying them [alleged Islamist militants] for ten years now but there are more and more – like the Hydra, you chop off one head and two more appear."

Shikhaliyev outlined how, after going underground in the wake of the 1999 anti-Wahhabi Law, many Salafis moved elsewhere in Russia, or obtained residency or asylum in Europe, where some took up aggressive campaigning for militant action against the Dagestani authorities. Among those who remained, he said, some who were initially peaceful became targets for attack by the law enforcement agencies and took up arms as a result: "This was just an additional stimulus to go into the forest" (join the insurgency).

Shikhaliyev also suggested that terrorist attacks in Dagestan had escalated since 2005 – despite a softening in state policy – because alleged extremists handed down short prison sentences of 2-3 years served them in institutions in Dagestan, where they became even more embittered and set on revenge after release.

In Derbent, the Shafiyev brothers also suggested that a repressive policy was counterproductive. "When we went to mosque, the authorities could monitor us, but when they wouldn't let us go, we broke into groups and they couldn't," they explained to Forum 18. "They created this problem themselves."

New tactic

The authorities now appear to be trying to win over the portion of Salafis who reject violence. Shikhaliyev of the Dagestan branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences explained to Forum 18 that some Dagestani Salafis refuse to submit to non-Muslim rule because they regard their republic as part of Dar al-Islam, or Islamic territory, and believe its secular government should be resisted by all available means, including terrorism.

While not opposed to the idea of a caliphate in the North Caucasus, he said other Salafis believe Dagestan belongs instead to Dar al-Sulh - non-Muslim territory agreeing to protect resident Muslims - and thus see it as acceptable to live under a secular government. The latter group rejects the terrorist acts claimed by the self-styled Caucasus Emirate, he told Forum 18.

Press secretary of the Spiritual Directorate of Muslims of Dagestan, Magomedrasul Omarov acknowledged that Salafis could be categorised as radical and moderate, and said steps were now being taken to engage the latter in dialogue. "There is nowhere else for them to go," he remarked to Forum 18 on 21 April.

Overall, there appears little interest among Dagestani Muslims in living in an Islamic state, according to Zaid Abdulagatov, a sociologist at the Institute of History, Archaeology and Ethnography of the Dagestan branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences. He found that approximately half of Muslims polled in recent years thought that Islam should remain the same as during the life of the Prophet Mohammed and his earliest followers, initially suggesting a fundamentalist position. But Abdulagatov told Forum 18 on 16 April that

around three-quarters went on to say they were opposed to living in an Islamic republic where sharia was the main law.

Obstacles

However, many in Dagestan's political and Muslim establishment remain wary of a change in policy, due to frequent insurgent attacks against their colleagues. Omarov pointed out that ten Directorate imams had been killed and five injured in recent years, while Maksud Sadikov, rector of Makhachkala's Institute of Theology and International Relations, told Forum 18 on 20 April that three of its lecturers had been killed in just five years of operation.

Rasul Gadzhiyev (no relation to Abdulmumin), departmental head of Dagestan's Ministry for Nationality Policy, Information and External Affairs, supported dialogue if the participants had peaceful intentions. However, he claimed that the behaviour of those who described themselves as Salafis after the adoption of the 1999 anti-Wahhabi law "didn't correspond to what they said about religion at all. They killed people, formed armed groups," he maintained to Forum 18 on 22 April. "Why did they do that, if a believer's weapon is knowledge? It's impossible they could exist peacefully."

Gadzhiyev confirmed that policy changes were taking place, however, reporting that Dagestan's long-standing Council for Religious Affairs was in the process of being scrapped and its brief transferred to his own Ministry.

But by this stage, the main reason for distrust of Dagestan's government among the Muslim community – and thus of the Directorate, as it enjoys government backing – is endemic corruption. Forum 18 was told of traffic police demands for bribes to avoid prosecution for non-existent violations, of 5,000 roubles (1,043 Norwegian Kroner, 131 Euros or 161 US Dollars) or more to receive technically free state medical treatment or children's education, and of many times that to enrol in university, "after which a person with a good mind still can't get work because all the key posts are occupied by non-professionals with good family or other connections".

This underlying problem would have to be tackled before any improvement in the religious freedom situation were reached, Shikhaliyev of the Dagestan branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences pointed out. But he related a popular Dagestani joke about there being two solutions to the republic's chronic problems, one realistic, the other fantasy. "One is if all government officials become honest and stop taking bribes, the other is if aliens land here and make everything good. The second option is more realistic."

Dagestan's controls on Islamic literature

By Geraldine Fagan

Forum 18 (26.05.2010) / HRWF (27.05.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - While Dagestan's government does not formally ban particular items of Islamic literature, it grants the Spiritual Directorate of Muslims of Dagestan exclusive vetting powers over what is circulated, Forum 18 News Service has found. "It's clearer to them if someone calls for violence or not," Rasul Gadzhiyev, departmental head of Dagestan's Ministry for Nationality Policy, Information and External Affairs, explained in the capital Makhachkala on 22 April.

Dagestan's 1998 Religion Law requires that all Islamic literature be endorsed by the Directorate (Article 21). A separate law adopted in 1999 specifically targets Wahhabism – defined only as an "extremist trend". In Dagestan Forum 18 found that Salafis - advocates of what they regard as a pure form of Islam as practised by the earliest Muslims - are informally referred to as Wahhabis regardless of whether they reject violence.

Restrictions on Islamic literature represent a major element in the near monopoly on Muslim public life enjoyed by the Directorate.

The restrictions are not always enforced. In practice, they mean that Islamic literature which does not display an endorsement from the Directorate is regarded with suspicion. There are limited opportunities to buy or sell such literature, as all mosques and prominent Islamic bookshops come under Directorate control. For Dagestan's many practising Muslims, easy access to information on Islam is thus limited to a relatively narrow range of viewpoints. Moreover, possession of "unapproved" books may mean the authorities identify their owner as a "Wahhabi extremist".

Dagestan - a republic in Russia's troubled North Caucasus which borders Azerbaijan and Georgia - is highly ethnically diverse. Most of the population is of Muslim background, the majority of them Sunnis but with a Shia minority.

Approved and unapproved

Some Islamic literature opposed by Directorate clerics – such as Russian translations of the Koran – could not be formally banned as extremist anyway, Abdulmumin Gadzhiev (no relation to Rasul), Islamic affairs correspondent with Dagestan's popular independent Russian-language newspaper Chernovik, told Forum 18 on 15 April. "But it doesn't stop them [the Directorate] saying you're not allowed to read it or going round town telling Muslim bookshops to remove this or that literature," he remarked.

Dated 1 June 2006, a list of Islamic books containing "canonical mistakes" and therefore "not approved by the Expert Council of the Spiritual Directorate of Muslims of Dagestan" was posted on a Russian-language internet forum in September 2008. It contains 173 titles, including many legally published in Moscow and Kazan (Tatarstan Republic), such as the renowned Russian translation of the Koran by Elmir Kuliiev and works by Shamil Alyautdinov, imam of the memorial mosque in Moscow's Victory Park.

Soon after such lists were circulated in Makhachkala in February 2009, a mob raided an independent Islamic bookshop in the city centre, its proprietor Magomedkhan Gaziiev told Forum 18 on 20 April. The mob leader accused Gaziiev of being a Wahhabi and selling Wahhabi literature, he recalled, even though the shop operates legally and its books are freely published elsewhere in Russia. The mob leader then ordered his approximately 100 accomplices to remove the shop's entire stock, worth some 100,000 Roubles (20,852 Norwegian Kroner, 2,567 Euros or 3,209 US Dollars). A state investigation into the incident has failed to locate either the stock or perpetrators, who had tried to attack other Islamic bookshops in the neighbourhood before finding Gaziiev's open.

Directorate press secretary Magomedrasul Omarov confirmed to Forum 18 on 21 April that about a week before the raid its representatives had toured Makhachkala's mosques and approximately 30 Islamic shops showing two lists of literature recommended and not recommended by the Directorate. He insisted the close proximity of the raid and visits was pure coincidence.

Forum 18 found a stark contrast between Gaziyev's small bookshop and those operated by the Directorate. Gaziyev's carries titles mainly published outside Dagestan, including seven works by Alyautdinov and several Russian-language translations of the Koran. The majority of books in the Directorate's opulent shops near to Makhachkala's main mosque are published in Dagestan and deal with aspects of Sufism or the life and teachings of Sheikh Said-afandi of Chirkei, a particular spiritual authority for the Directorate. They also carry numerous pamphlets condemning Wahhabism in a manner similar to Orthodox anti-sectarian brochures, with titles such as "Caution, Wahhabism!" and "Confessions of An English Spy". Only Arabic texts of the Koran are on sale.

What's wrong with Russian Koran?

While praising some translations of the Koran on sale in Dagestan, Maksud Sadikov, rector of Makhachkala's Institute of Theology and International Relations - which works closely with the Directorate - acknowledged that they were not generally welcomed by the wider religious community. "A literal translation could lead a person into error, as the Koran is the word of God, and every word needs a commentary on what it means," he explained t

Forum 18 on 20 April.

Shamil Shikhaliyev, head of the Oriental Manuscripts Department at the Institute of History, Archaeology and Ethnography of the Dagestan branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences, recounted an incident suggesting the local authorities follow the Directorate's position on Islamic literature. In 2004, he told Forum 18, he was briefly detained by a local police officer concerned that he was carrying a book in Arabic, but was released as soon as the officer was satisfied that its author had been a teacher to Sheikh Said-afandi.

Shikhaliyev suspects that the local restrictions on literature are commercially based: "What connection do translations of the Koran and hadiths (sayings attributed to the Muslim Prophet Mohammed) have with Wahhabism?" he pointed out to Forum 18 on 16 April. "The Directorate criticises translations of the Koran, saying the translator adds a subjective sense - but in sermons they read excerpts in Arabic and then recite a translation."

A Makhachala-based lawyer working with the Russian human rights organisation Memorial, Ziyautdin Uvaisov similarly suggested to Forum 18 on 15 April that the purpose of the restrictions was to secure a monopoly on Koranic interpretation.

Salafi brothers Abumuslim and Mogamed Shafiyev maintained to Forum 18 in the southern city of Derbent on 17 April that the restrictions' deeper purpose was to stop people thinking for themselves. "They don't want an educated society - when society is educated it cannot be controlled. If someone reads, is educated, he'll say, 'You what? That's not on!'"

Nursi doubts

Makhachkala resident Ziyautdin Dapayev remains a suspect in a criminal extremism investigation opened in December 2009, but is no longer a defendant and there have been no further developments in the case, he told Forum 18 on 19 April. His 20-strong home reading group devoted to the late Turkish theologian Said Nursi has now been raided four times - in 2007, 2008 and in April and December of 2009, he said. Dapayev estimates that a total of 10,000 books were seized in the course of these raids; officially under expert analysis, they are not subject to return, he explained.

Dapayev described to Forum 18 how the raids took the form of full-blown counterterrorist operations, with up to 80 armed law enforcement agents. On the last occasion the entire building was cordoned off, he said, "as if we're criminals, although everyone knows we don't pose any danger whatsoever".

After the raids, a RIA Novosti Dagestan report on 24 December 2009 claimed that "conspiratorial cells" of Nursi readers meet in "conspiratorial flats" in Dagestan.

Russian translations of Nursi's "Risale-i Nur" ("Messages of Light") multi-part Koranic commentary were outlawed by Moscow's Koptevo District Court in May 2007 and subsequently added to the Federal List of Extremist Materials. Nurdzhular – which Nursi readers insist does not exist – was then banned as an extremist organisation by Russia's Supreme Court in April 2008. Defenders of state action against Nursi followers routinely claim that his works are banned in Turkey, but official Turkish government documents viewed by Forum 18 state categorically that the theologian's works are not harmful in any way whatsoever and are freely available in Turkey.

Commissioned by a district court in Krasnoyarsk in June 2009 to analyse "Tenth Word on the Resurrection of the Dead", a part of "Risale-i Nur" not outlawed by Koptevo Court, three experts from Moscow State University – including two psychology professors – have concluded that it contains no signs of extremism. Their 28 April 2010 report states that "a belief in the superiority of one's world view over other world views is characteristic of the doctrines of Islam, other religions and atheism, as it accounts for the choice of that particular world view"

In Dagestan, Nursi's works were widely known and accepted before the bans. "They were sold in official Directorate shops with their approval and imams had them," Dapayev told Forum 18. Soon after the ban on the Russian translations of "Risale-i Nur" these were withdrawn, but this has not stopped the FSB security service from confiscating non-banned Nursi titles and copies of the Koran, he said.

There is doubt in Dagestan about the federal-level ban on Nursi literature, as there also is in Tatarstan. Dapayev and his fellow Nursi readers continue to attend Makhachkala's main, Directorate-controlled mosque, where worshippers regard them positively, he told Forum 18. Sadikov, the Institute rector, gave the group premises for meetings in March 2010 but stopped after the FSB security service warned him he would have problems if the arrangement continued, Dapayev said.

Sadikov told Forum 18 that "we don't find any canonical flaws in the works of Said Nursi" and described him as "a great scholar". He acknowledged that he had invited Nursi readers to use his institute's premises, but said they had stopped coming after several meetings. He claimed not to know why.

Dagestan's Sufi monopoly

By Geraldine Fagan

Forum 18 (25.05.2010) / HRWF (27.05.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - In their effort to counter the local Islamist insurgency, Dagestan's authorities have imposed a near monopoly on Islam by a narrow strand of Sufism, Forum 18 News Service has found. Although this domination is not absolute, it dramatically reduces the public space allowed for

Muslims who do not wish to subjugate themselves to the one permitted Spiritual Directorate. By reinforcing the perception that only Muslims with legal status under the Spiritual Directorate are legitimate, it has also fuelled persecution of other Muslims by law-enforcement agencies, Forum 18 was told.

The state backed those who form the present Spiritual Directorate of Muslims of Dagestan precisely as "the most resolutely aggressive towards Salafis", believes Shamil Shikhaliyev, head of the Oriental Manuscripts Department at the Institute of History, Archaeology and Ethnography of the Dagestan branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences. (Salafis advocate what they regard as a pure form of Islam as practised by the earliest Muslims).

However, far from all Muslims in Dagestan recognise the legitimacy of the Directorate, founded in 1998. While most adhere to Sufism to varying degrees, only four or five of the republic's over 20 sheikhs (Sufi spiritual leaders) actually recognise the Directorate, Shikhaliyev told Forum 18 in the capital Makhachkala on 16 April. Opposition sheikhs – whose attitude towards one another varies from neutral to positive – have authority in some 60 per cent of Dagestan's districts, he estimates. "The Directorate doesn't even represent the majority."

Dagestan - a republic in Russia's troubled North Caucasus which borders Azerbaijan and Georgia - is highly ethnically diverse. Most of the population is of Muslim background, the majority of them Sunnis but with a Shia minority.

Legal monopoly

A series of local provisions combine to give the Directorate legal control over Muslim public life in Dagestan. The republic's January 1998 Religion Law permits only one umbrella organisation per confession (Article 10). Under Dagestan's September 1999 anti-Wahhabi law, local religious communities require the endorsement of this umbrella organisation – in Islam's case, the Directorate - in order to register (Article 4). These measures are fully enforced, as the state registers mosques only with the seal of approval of Mufti Akhmed-khadzhi Abdulayev, the leader of the Directorate, its Press Secretary Magomedrasul Omarov confirmed to Forum 18 on 21 April.

Religious literature and education are particularly restricted, although to varying degrees in practice. Under the 1998 Law (Article 21), an umbrella organisation's approval is required for the production, acquisition and distribution of religious literature, audio and video material and other items of religious significance.

Also under the 1998 Law (Article 9), both religious educational materials and study abroad are subject to approval by the umbrella organisation. Under the 1999 Law (Article 3), anyone teaching religion – even in private – must have the permission of the umbrella organisation (see forthcoming article).

The 1999 Law is aimed particularly at Wahhabism, which it defines only as an "extremist trend". In Dagestan Forum 18 found that Salafis are informally referred to as Wahhabis regardless of whether they reject violence.

Elsewhere in Russia, Wahhabism is usually understood as the belief in the legitimacy of violence in the pursuit of Islamic ideals. The term derives from the surname of Mohammed ibn Abdul-Wahhab, whose radical teachings form the religious basis of the present-day kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Restrictions defended

Directorate press secretary Magomedrasul Omarov defended his organisation's artificial domination of Islam in Dagestan to Forum 18, explaining that otherwise spiritual directorates founded by ethnicity would lead to "splintering - Muslims form one ummah, after all", and that the authorities would be unable to co-ordinate relations with different directorates, even for Dagestan's major ethnicities. He denied that the Directorate receives financial support from the state, however. "You won't see one mosque built on state funds (..) the state is separate from religion, and they remind us of that very firmly when it comes to giving money."

Omarov also denied that the Directorate was a particularly Sufi institution, insisting that it recognised as Muslims all who revere Allah and the Prophet Mohammed. He estimated there to be just four or five sheikhs in Dagestan, however, laughing that "there are plenty of impostors, of course, but we won't talk about them."

Also defending the restrictions was Rasul Gadzhiyev (no relation to Magomedgadzhi), departmental head of Dagestan's Ministry for Nationality Policy, Information and External Affairs. Insisting there was nothing in the 1998 Law contradicting Russia's 1997 federal

Religion Law (which in fact does not support the provisions outlined above), he stopped short of confirming that non-Directorate Muslims could organise separately, and supported the practice of having a single umbrella organisation per confession. "In not one Islamic country is there a mosque for these or those, for separate groups," he maintained to Forum 18 on 22 April. "It's very dangerous, for one thing. A mosque is a mosque, for all believers without distinction." Gadzhiyev also dismissed the plight of Muslims who did not recognise the Directorate: "It's their problem if they can't speak to their fellow believers in a common language."

Narrow strand

If the current Directorate were more inclusive, the restrictions would prove less significant – but it represents a relatively narrow theological strand within Sufism which a significant portion of Dagestani Muslims criticise or even reject. According to Shikhaliyev, opposition sheikhs have serious doubts about the practices of Directorate sheikhs, such as giving their murids (disciples) photographs of deceased sheikhs and even the Muslim Prophet Mohammed as visual aids in *rabita* – a Sufi practice in which a murid receives divine light by meditative contact with a particular sheikh and through him a line of sheikhs reaching back to the Prophet. Most Muslims observe a ban on depictions of living beings.

A 2008 publication endorsed by the Directorate and sold in its Makhachkala bookshops, Ali-Khadzhi Saigidguseinov's "Sufism: Foundation and Essence", supports this practice. "It is good to pass photographs and portraits of great scholar-theologians to people who did not see them," it declares. "In truth, grace is contained in their remembrance, just as it is in a meeting with them."

By contrast, Shikhaliyev told Forum 18, many Salafis trust certain opposition sheikhs and attend mosques associated with them. Both groups claim the Directorate wrongly places its particular tariqah (Sufi religious order) above broader Muslim scholarship by citing unproven oral tradition over the Koran and established hadiths (sayings attributed to the Prophet Mohammed). Shikhaliyev gave the example of a hadith claimed by followers of the Directorate's main Sheikh Said-afandi of Chirkei which states that, on ascending to heaven, the Prophet Mohammed looked down and saw a beautiful green patch of land by the

sea. Asking the angel Gabriel what it was, he was purportedly told: "That's Dagestan - there will be many ulema (Muslim scholars) there in the Last Days."

At least publicly, those associated with alternative sheikhs proved reluctant to criticise the Directorate's apparently sole regard for Sheikh Said-afandi, however. "Whether it's him or someone else doesn't bother us," Magomedgadzhi Gadzhiyev, pro-rector of Makhachkala's Imam Shafi'i Islamic University and follower of a line of sheikhs whose present leader is based in northern Cyprus, remarked to Forum 18 on 19 April. "Whether someone goes to Sheikh Said-Afandi or to us is in the hands of Allah."

But if opposition Sufis' concerns are over theological emphasis and the authenticity of Sheikh Said-afandi's succession, for Salafis all involvement with the Directorate is impossible. As well as distrusting its proximity to the state, Salafis Abumuslim and Mogamed Shafiyev made clear to Forum 18 in the southern city of Derbent on 17 April that they completely reject its theology: "Their religion is fairy tales."

By granting only the Directorate legal status and criminalising so-called Wahhabism, the Shafiyevs argue, the authorities encouraged the law enforcement agencies to target even peaceful Salafis. This has, they claim, included pressure to leave Dagestan, detention, torture or even - as the Shafiyevs believe happened to their brother Sirazhudin - abduction and killing.

Partial influence

Amid signs that the authorities are now considering loosening the Directorate's grip (see forthcoming article), Forum 18 found its control to be increasingly partial in practice. Abdulmumin Gadzhiyev (no relation to Magomedgadzhi or Rasul), Islamic affairs correspondent with Dagestan's popular independent Russian-language newspaper Chernovik, noted on 15 April that while mosques are officially allotted to the Directorate, over half of some communities are dissenters, "although there is no mosque in Makhachkala where the imam is overtly Salafi and in opposition to the Directorate."

Islamic scholar Shikhaliyev also remarked to Forum 18 that while all mosques are formally on the books of the Directorate, the situation has recently become freer for Salafis. Power has been gradually shifting in mosques - and imams even replaced - in the settlements of Buinaksk, Gubden and Shamkhal.

According to official local government figures, Dagestan has 2,365 mosques as of January 2010, all but 19 of them Sunni. Just 27 operated legally in the latter Soviet period.

Muslim community leader kidnapped by Dagestan authorities?

By Geraldine Fagan

Forum 18 (05.05.2010) / HRWF (11.05.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Last seen on 8 September 2009, Sirazhudin Shafiyev was abducted and killed by the security services in connection with his religious activity, his two younger brothers suspect. "Our whole family professes the kind of Islam there is in the normal, civilised world, which there was at all times starting with the Prophet Mohammed," Abumuslim and Mogamed Shafiyev explained

to Forum 18 News Service in Russia's oldest and southernmost city of Derbent on 17 April. "For this we are persecuted."

The brothers have no evidence that the authorities were involved in Sirazhudin's disappearance. Witnesses say he was dragged from his car after dropping his children at kindergarten on the morning of 8 September. Viewed by Forum 18, a photograph of the incident shows two attackers in black, their faces obscured by balaclavas.

The Shafiyevs point out, however, that while only a handful of people knew Sirazhudin had visited an imam in Izberbash further up the Caspian Sea coast from Derbent on the evening of 7 September with passports and money from four pilgrims planning to go on the haj pilgrimage to Mecca, on 9 September counterterrorist police arrived at the Izberbash mosque demanding the passports and money.

The brothers also claim law enforcement agents later told them informally that Sirazhudin's body would have been returned had the family not kicked up a fuss. Relatives and hundreds of protesters blocked major Derbent roads on the day Sirazhudin disappeared, insisting prosecutors investigate. "And how can they return the body of someone they killed if there is an official criminal investigation open under kidnap?"

Dismissing complaints from opposition Muslims about kidnap and extermination on 22 April was Rasul Gadzhiyev, departmental head of Dagestan's Ministry for Nationality Policy, Information and External Affairs. "Of course they try to blame the state and say it is opposing and persecuting them," he told Forum 18 in the republic's capital, Makhachkala

"But no one is going to pursue you if you haven't committed a crime prosecutable by law."

Trouble follows mosque leadership election

Like other Salafis – advocates of what they regard as a pure form of Islam as practised by the earliest Muslims – the Shafiyevs worshipped at Derbent's eighth-century Juma Mosque unimpeded until 2005. Trouble began, they told Forum 18, when mosque-goers removed their non-Salafi imam by democratic election and installed a young Salafi who had graduated from Egypt's Al-Azhar Islamic University.

A mass brawl at the Mosque on 9 April 2005 was incited by Sufi and Shia Muslims in order to block the election result, the brothers allege. Sirazhudin Shafiyev was chosen in the wake of these events to negotiate for the Salafi side due to his secular education from Voronezh University. He thus became viewed by the authorities as "leader of the extremists", they believe.

Dagestan's tight control of Islam

Dagestan – a republic in Russia's troubled North Caucasus which borders Azerbaijan and Georgia – is highly ethnically diverse. Most of the population is of Muslim background, the majority of them Sunnis but with a Shia minority.

Imams and others teaching Islam are subject to tight controls in Dagestan. Under a 1999 local law banning Wahhabism – defined only as "extremist" but informally used interchangeably with Salafism – anyone teaching religion must be endorsed by a republican religious organisation. Under Dagestan's 1998 Religion Law, only one such organisation is permitted per confession, and the current Muslim Spiritual Directorate of Dagestan favours Sufism to the exclusion of Salafism (see forthcoming F18News articles).

The Spiritual Directorate's press secretary, Magomedrasul Omarov maintained to Forum 18 on 21 April that the situation surrounding Derbent's Juma Mosque – which he described as a conflict between Sunni and Shia Muslims – was now resolved, and that both sides were able to worship there in succession. With its extensive library named after Imam Hussein (particularly revered by Shia Muslims), the Mosque appeared under Shia control during Forum 18's visit on 17 April, although few worshippers responded to a Shia call to prayer.

In the wake of the mosque dispute, the Shafiyevs were repeatedly subjected to house searches "for rockets, ballistic missiles, nuclear bombs," Abumuslim joked. Not finding weaponry, law enforcement agents confiscated "ordinary books", he said – including Russian translations of the Koran and hadiths (sayings attributed to the Muslim Prophet Mohammed).

While not formally banned, a list of Islamic literature "not recommended" and termed "Wahhabi" by the Spiritual Directorate includes Russian translations of the Koran and other titles widely on sale elsewhere in Russia (see forthcoming F18News article).

"Wahhabi lists"

According to the Shafiyev brothers, other Salafis were also targeted with the aid of lists drawn up by police and, they suspect, the religious establishment: "That Spiritual Directorate is a branch of the FSB [security service]! Everyone knows that."

Muslims in the North Caucasus republic of Kabardino-Balkaria have similarly told Forum 18 that the names of those controversially detained or wanted for extremist activity at this time were culled from police records of regular mosque-goers, or "Wahhabi lists".

The Spiritual Directorate's press secretary shared the Shafiyevs' criticism of blacklisting devout Muslims, however. "Every policeman started forming his own criteria. Someone wears a tubeteika [cap commonly worn by Turkic Muslim men] or goes to mosque morning and evening and he goes on a police list," Magomedrasul Omarov remarked to Forum 18. "Should he be persecuted for looking different? Of course not. The people resented this."

Gadzhiyev of the Ministry for Nationality Policy, Information and External Affairs insisted to Forum 18 that the state plays "absolutely no role" in the Spiritual Directorate's activity.

Authorities admit maintaining lists

The law enforcement agencies acknowledge maintaining lists of suspected Wahhabis. In a compilation of papers from a Dagestan government conference on preventing religious-political extremism held in Makhachkala in May 2009, Derbent's deputy head of administration Dmitry Dunayev refers to police records of 42 "adherents of Wahhabism" in the town: "Their whereabouts and their form of activity are known; they are not engaged in active activity and are within the sights of the law enforcement agencies."

Special attention is paid to the teenage children of such people, Dunayev continues. "These minors are monitored where they study and the corresponding work is carried out with them."

In his 2008 survey of attitudes towards Islam in Dagestan, local sociologist Zaid Abdulagatov cites a September 2005 record of 1,070 "adherents of Wahhabism" in the republic issued by its Department for Fighting Extremism and Criminal Terrorism.

Head of the Oriental Manuscripts Department at the Institute of History, Archaeology and Ethnography of the Dagestan branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Shamil Shikhaliyev described to Forum 18 on 16 April how arbitrary pursuit of Wahhabis relied upon particular dress and mannerisms, similar to reports from Kabardino-Balkaria. Instead of proving that Salafis had fought or aided insurgents, he said, the authorities "embitter them – catch someone with a beard, beat him up, force him to sign a confession and imprison him according to this confession."

Shikhaliyev had heard of cases in which even murids (disciples) of opposition Sufi sheikhs were branded Wahhabis.

He and others Forum 18 spoke to felt that the state's approach had become less sweeping in Dagestan from around 2005, however (see forthcoming F18News article).

Traders of western fashion clothing at a Derbent market, Abumuslim and Magomed Shafiyev are of secular appearance, as was Sirazhudin in a photograph they showed to Forum 18.

Salafis treated as terrorists?

The Derbent crackdown forced many Salafis to flee Dagestan, the Shafiyev brothers told Forum 18, and encouraged others to "go into the forest" – or join the insurgency. Still others were imprisoned following what the pair described as "theatre" trials on extremism and other charges. The Shafiyevs and others who remain have feared to attend public mosque since 2005, they said: "Their people [Sufi and Shia Muslims] go to mosque, we would be picked up straight away." "We're all on the list," Abumuslim explained, "even him" - he pointed to his two-year-old son. "In ten years they'll come and take him too."

Salafi communal worship at home is also impossible for fear of raids, the Shafiyevs added. If a group gathers, they explained, the law enforcement agencies are likely to launch an assault on the home in what they would later describe as a successful counterterrorist operation. Abductions and killings are also similarly presented, the brothers maintained, recalling a case in which a postal clerk disappeared from his workplace and his bullet-ridden body – still in smart office clothes – was later returned in camouflage combat clothing many sizes too large and unmarked by bullet holes or even blood.

Law enforcement agents believe Salafis are automatically potential terrorists, Abumuslim explained to Forum 18. "They say it's just a question of time, that if not today then tomorrow you'll take up arms and kill, so we're killing you in advance. They don't want there to be a single Salafi here. That's their aim." (END)

Does Dagestan need its anti-Wahhabi law?

By Geraldine Fagan

Forum 18 (05.05.2010) / HRWF (11.05.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Government and Muslim establishment representatives in the southern Russian republic of Dagestan have defended to Forum 18 News Service the need for a local law banning Wahhabism. While some specialists now suggest removing this term from the current law's title, "no one's talking about annulling it – no way," Rasul Gadzhiyev, departmental head of Dagestan's

Ministry for Nationality Policy, Information and External Affairs, insisted to Forum 18 in the republican capital Makhachkala on 22 April.

Critics of the law - in force since September 1999 - believe its failure to define Wahhabism other than as an "extremist trend" contributed to the hounding of peaceful Salafi Muslims and indirectly stoked Dagestan's insurgency.

Dagestan – a republic in Russia's troubled North Caucasus which borders Azerbaijan and Georgia – is highly ethnically diverse. Most of the population is of Muslim background, the majority of them Sunnis but with a Shia minority.

In Dagestan, Forum 18 found that Salafis - advocates of what they regard as a pure form of Islam as practised by the earliest Muslims – are often referred to as Wahhabis regardless of whether they reject violence.

Elsewhere in Russia, Wahhabism is usually understood as the belief in the legitimacy of violence in the pursuit of Islamic ideals. The term derives from the surname of Mohammed ibn Abdul-Wahhab, whose radical teachings form the religious basis of the present-day kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Is anti-Wahhabi law needed?

Although he defended the 1999 Law, Gadzhiyev of the Ministry for Nationality Policy, Information and External Affairs could not state definitively why it was needed in addition to Russia's 2002 Extremism Law. On the one hand, he explained that the Law proceeded from the assumption that Wahhabi ideology inevitably leads to violence, and gave the example of a teenage suicide bomber shouting "Allahu Akbar" ["God is great"] - "This young man uses religious terminology to justify terrorist action, and the law finds its niche in these questions."

But he also acknowledged that the suicide bomber would be committing the criminal offence of terrorism regardless of what he shouted beforehand, and remarked that he personally did not entirely agree with the idea of banning Wahhabism without defining it. The term had been used, he told Forum 18, "with consideration of the opinion of our clergy".

Press secretary of the Spiritual Directorate of Muslims of Dagestan, Magomedrasul Omarov was certain Wahhabism as an ideology posed a threat to Dagestan which it did not in its homeland of Saudi Arabia. There, he explained to Forum 18 on 21 April, its refusal to submit to the rule of unbelievers could have no impact. "They have power already, they have nothing more to achieve. All their criteria are met. Who are they going to kill? But here in the Caucasus, it's different."

Omarov criticised law-makers for rendering the 1999 Law powerless by failing to include a mechanism for its implementation. "If it had been finished off it wouldn't have been bad, there wouldn't have been as many explosions (..) it was the great fault of our politicians that it wasn't completed."

Such a mechanism, he told Forum 18, should take into account the borderline between peaceful Wahhabi and terrorist: "If the state cannot make this distinction, the state will lose". Asked to illustrate it, however, he chose examples from opposite ends of the spectrum: an 80-year-old man following Wahhabism in his own home and a self-declared Wahhabi suicide bomber - "he's a violator".

When pressed on this point, Omarov switched to preferring Dagestan's centuries-old code of honour over a law: "Reconciliation and dialogue in disputes - it would be much more practical and realistic if I go to a person and shake his hand rather than having a law stopping and scaring me."

Law "exists only on paper"

Rector of Makhachkala's state-sponsored Institute of Theology and International Relations, Maksud Sadikov also broadly defended the need for the 1999 Law as "fulfilling a certain psychological function [by] stating categorically that Wahhabism is not something good."

While also noting to Forum 18 on 20 April that the law "exists only on paper" as it has no mechanism for implementation, Sadikov maintained that it could not possibly have any effect against someone "who sits at home and prays differently from everyone else or reads different books" unless this activity was accompanied by criminal acts. "The state isn't clairvoyant."

Sadikov also defended the 1999 Law as drawn up "to try to curb this phenomenon somehow" within weeks of a major incursion by Chechen rebels seeking to support the leaders of a self-proclaimed Islamic state based on the Dagestani village of Karamakhi. Gadzhiev of the Ministry for Nationality Policy, Information and External Affairs similarly justified the Law's adoption as a legitimate response to this separatist movement, maintaining that it "allowed us to stabilise the situation in the republic in an efficient and timely manner".

A Makhachala-based lawyer working with the Russian human rights organisation Memorial, Ziyautdin Uvaisov told Forum 18 on 15 April that the 1999 Law had not been directly enforced in practice, however. Its appearance was sooner the result of local practice than the reverse, he suggested, as local practice – such as the alleged planting of weapons during house searches - "doesn't need formal laws".

State endorsement of some forms of Islam?

Head of the Oriental Manuscripts Department at the Institute of History, Archaeology and Ethnography of the Dagestan branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Shamil Shikhaliyev pointed out that many in Dagestan now believe the 1999 Law to be a mistake "because in practice it determines the state's priorities in the religious sphere".

By outlawing Wahhabism as a religious trend, he explained to Forum 18 on 16 April, the state in effect endorsed other forms of Islam. "But who gave the state the right to judge what is correct and what is incorrect in Islam? Even top scholars of Islam say you can't divide it into pure and impure."

Shikhaliyev also rejected legal categorisation of advocates of so-called "pure Islam" as a potential danger: "Whether a convinced Salafi visits a cemetery or not, reads a mavlid [verse in honour of the Muslim Prophet Mohammed] or not, he's expressing his right to freedom of conscience guaranteed by the Constitution." If such a Salafi were to incite or commit violent acts against the state authorities, he explained, this would in any case be dealt with by other laws or the Criminal Code. "So this law wasn't needed at all in Dagestan."

Jehovah's Witnesses forbidden to hand out magazines

"ROSKOMNADZOR" cancels permission for distribution of Jehovah's Witnesses publications

Ministry of Communication and Mass Media of Russian Federation (30.04.2010) / HRWF (10.05.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - By an order of 26 April 2010, the Federal Service on Oversight in the Sphere of Communications, Information Technologies, and Mass Media (Roskomnadzor) annulled the permission for distribution on the territory of Russia of foreign periodical printed publications "Awake" and "Watchtower," that was issued on 24 July 1997 by the State Committee of the Russian Federation for the Press.

The permission was rescinded on the basis of decisions of courts of the Russian federation that found a whole series of materials of the publications "Awake" and "Watchtower" to be extremist.

Courts of the Russian federation rules as extremist materials of the publication "Awake" from 08.04.1998, 08.12.1998, 22.02.1999, 22.02.2000, 22.10.2000, January, February, April 2007, April 2008, January 2009, and of the publication "Watchtower" from 15.05.1998, 01.10.1998, 15.10.1998, 15.02.1999, 15.12.1999, 01.03.2001, 01.11.2001, 15.02.2002, 01.03.2002, 15.01.2007, 01.03.2007, 15.03.2007, 01.04.2007, 01.01.2009, 15.01.2009, 01.02.2009. All these publications have been included by courts in the Federal List of Extremist Materials.

Permission for distribution on the territory of Russia of foreign periodical printed publication "Awake" and "Watchtower" was issued to the firm "Wachturm Bibel—und Traktat-Gesellschaft, Deutscher Zqeig, e.V. (address: Niederselters, Am Steinfels, D-65618 Selters). The applicant and distributor of the printed productions is the Administrative Center of the Regional Religious Organization of Jehovah's Witnesses. (tr. by PDS, posted 3 May 2010)

Mormons win court case against officials trying to limit evangelism

South Sakhalin court permits Mormons to teach English without licences

Portal-credu.ru (30.04.2010) / HRWF (10.05.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - In connection with the posting on a number of sites of information about "prohibition of Mormons from teaching English language to Sakhalin residents without corresponding licenses," the centralized religious organization "Religious Association of Churches of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Russia" has found it necessary to inform the public about the results of judicial investigations that have been held on this matter, declared the Deputy Director of the Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints for Relations with the Public in Eastern Europe, Andrei Filimonov.

The local religious organization of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the city of Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk maintains broad international ties and contacts with foreign fellow-believers and regularly invites foreign citizens for the purpose of conducting evangelistic activity.

However in the course of the past year a number of state agencies have raised obstacles to this activity in Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk. Under pressure from them, in August 2009 the religious organization was forced to stop conducting classes for people wishing to improve their use of English by means of conversing with English-speakers who were missionaries, USA citizens legally resident in the Russian federation. This form of work, which is one of the varieties of charitable activity, enjoyed a certain popularity among residents of Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk, who took advantage of the opportunity given them for improving language skills. Nevertheless, the religious organization was presented with baseless demands of its licensing, in violation of existing legislation (article 33 of the federal law "On education"). A justice of the peace issued orders to the religious organization and its chairman regarding "illegal conduct of educational activity" and assessed an administrative penalty in the form of fines totaling 20,000 rubles.

According to a regulation on licensing of educational activity, approved by a resolution of the Russian government of 31 March 2009, occasional lectures, seminars, and other forms of education that do not include final certification and issuance of documents regarding education and (or) qualification do not require the obtaining of a license. A license for such activity cannot be issued at all.

Organs of the Federal Migration Service, in their turn, considered the indicated activity of foreign missionaries as the performance of labor activity by foreign citizens in the Russian federation without permission for work. In connection with this the religious organization was held administratively liable and subjected to fines totaling one million rubles.

In accordance with article 2 of the federal law of 25 July 2002 "On the legal status of foreign citizens in Russia," labor activity by a foreign citizen is work of a foreign citizen in the Russian federation on the basis of a labor contract or civil and legal contract for conducting work (providing service). In accordance with church traditions (there is no professional clergy in this confession) the indicated foreign citizens, along with Russian believers, voluntarily and without charge performed evangelistic ministry without establishing labor or civil and legal relations with anybody. An ordinary humanitarian visa, on which they have entered the country, does not exclude providing charitable aid to citizens of the Russian federation.

The persons who were held administratively liable dissented from the decisions made and appealed them in accordance with established procedures. All appeals filed were satisfied by judicial instances. The Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk city court rescinded the orders of the justice of the peace and terminated the judicial decision regarding "illegal conduct of educational activity." The mediation court of Sakhalin province rescinded the resolution of the Administration of the Federal Migration Service for Sakhalin province concerning administrative violations of the law.

Organs of internal affairs and the migration service appealed these judicial decisions finding their actions illegal. Higher judicial instances left the appeals unsatisfied. The judicial decisions have taken legal effect. (tr. by PDS, posted 30 April 2010)

Outcry at Russian government's media crackdown bid

Amie Ferris-Rotman

Reuters (30.04.2010) / HRWF (04.05.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Rights groups on Friday denounced a bill that would enable Russia's security services to fine, summon and potentially detain journalists whose work is seen as aiding extremism.

Critics said the government bill, submitted to parliament last weekend, smacked of Soviet-style censorship.

It comes one month after twin suicide bombings blamed on female attackers from the North Caucasus killed 40 people in Moscow's metro, fuelling fears of a wave of bombings by Islamist militants from the turbulent region.

Activists said the proposal confirmed their fears the government would try to crimp civil freedoms after the attacks.

"This raises the possibility of returning to the repression of Soviet times and I do not like it one bit," Alexander Cherkasov, a North Caucasus expert from Russian rights group Memorial, told Reuters.

If passed by parliament and signed into law by President Dmitry Medvedev, the proposed legislative changes would also allow authorities to demand newspaper, websites and other media withdraw material deemed to "aid extremists."

"Certain media outlets, both printed and electronic, openly aid the formation of negative processes in the moral sphere," the government said in an accompanying statement to the proposed bill, on the parliament's official site duma.gov.ru.

Those outlets fostered "a cult of individualism and violence, and lack of faith in the state's ability to protect its citizens, effectively dragging youth into extremist activity," it said.

The FSB security service, successor to the Soviet KGB, would be responsible for implementation. Journalists could be called in for questioning by the FSB and face penalties up to 50,000 roubles (\$1,714) or 15 days of detention for failure to comply.

The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), a New York-based media watchdog, said the bill would give Russian authorities "Soviet-style power to censor information" and called for it to be immediately scrapped.

"Instead of focusing their energy on fighting work-related violence against journalists in Russia, authorities are gearing up to fight the journalists for doing their job," CPJ regional program coordinator Nina Ognianova said in a statement.

A slew of reports appeared in Russian media after the March 29 metro attacks that suggested the Kremlin's handling of the Islamist insurgency in the North Caucasus was ineffective, with some suggesting it had failed.

"How will we tackle extremism if there are sanctions on those who bring the topic into the public eye?" Cherkasov said.

Russia bans texts by Scientology founder

AFP (21.04.2010) / HRWF (26.04.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Russian prosecutors said Wednesday that dozens of texts and recordings by Scientology founder L. Ron Hubbard had been ruled "extremist" and would be banned in Russia.

"Materials on Scientology by Ron Hubbard have been found extremist and will be banned from distribution in Russia," the Russian prosecutor general's office said in a statement.

The ban relates to 28 books and audio-video discs containing lectures by Hubbard, a US science fiction author who founded Scientology in 1954, the statement said.

The ruling was the latest blow to the Church of Scientology, an organisation that some countries treat as a legitimate faith but that others consider a cult designed to trick members out of large sums of money.

The ban on the Scientology materials was imposed by a court in the city of Surgut in eastern Siberia, which decided they should be added to a list of literature banned in Russia for extremist content, the statement said.

The list of extremist literature includes numerous texts by Islamist groups and Russian ultranationalists, as well as some brochures distributed by Jehovah's Witnesses.

Local transport prosecutors in Surgut confiscated the Scientology materials after they were mailed there from the United States, then asked the court to declare them extremist, the statement said.

The materials contained calls "to commit crimes motivated by ideological and religious hatred" and "ideas justifying violence in general and in particular any methods of resistance against critics of Scientology," it said.

"This is some kind of mistake or misunderstanding," Yury Maksimov, a Moscow-based spokesman for the Church of Scientology, told AFP. "The materials cited are distributed all over the world."

The Church of Scientology, which says it is seeking a world free of "war, crime and insanity" and counts Hollywood stars Tom Cruise and John Travolta among its members, won the status of a religion in the United States in 1993.

But it is regarded with suspicion in many European countries, including France, Germany, Belgium and Greece, where opponents accuse it of manipulating members for financial ends. It has repeatedly encountered problems with Russian officials. Russia has twice been fined by the European Court of Human Rights for refusing to register Scientology churches as religious organisations.

Jehovah's Witnesses driven out of meeting place

Prosecutor gains cancellation of Jehovah's Witnesses' services in transbaikal village movie theatre

Portal-credo.ru (15.04.2010) / HRWF (21.04.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - The prosecutor of Karym region of Transbaikal territory has achieved the quashing of the conduct of religious events by Jehovah's Witnesses in the premises of a village movie theatre, which had been conducted there twice weekly. This was reported on 14 April to "Taige.info" by the prosecutor of Karym region of the territory, Denis Kurochkin.

The incidence of the conduct of these events was established by the regional prosecutor in the course of an investigation of the implementation on the territory of Karym village of legislation "On freedom of conscience and religious associations" and on combating extremist activity.

The director of the "Ekran" theatre, Sergei Chrniakov, did not deny the fact of providing the premises to the Jehovah's Witnesses. The meetings of the religious group were attended by about 30 persons, including young people. According to Prosecutor Kurochkin, there were instances when scheduled film showings were postponed because of the conduct of religious events.

"According to article 16 of the law "On freedom of conscience and religious associations," conduct of religious rites and ceremonies is permitted only in premises especially designated for these goals. The premises of the "Ekran" theatre are territorial property assigned to the operational administration of the Chita State Cinema Company, and may be used only for showing movie and video films," Denis Kurochkin said.

The presentation made by the regional prosecutor's office to the general director of "Chita State Cinema Company, Nikolai Privalov, has been reviewed and approved. The director of "Ekran" movie theatre has been reprimanded and the activity of the Jehovah's Witnesses on its territory has ceased.

"Portal-credo.ru" cites for your information part 2 of article 16, Religious rites and ceremonies, of the federal law "On freedom of conscience and religious associations."

2. Religious services and other religious rites and ceremonies are conducted without impediment within cult buildings and premises and territories attached to them, and in other places assigned to religious organizations for their purposes, in places of pilgrimage, in institutions and enterprises of religious organizations, in cemeteries and crematoria, and in living quarters.

Rental of clubs, houses of culture, movie theatres, athletic facilities, and so forth, for conduct of religious events, is a widely spread practice and does not contradict part 2, article 16, of the law "On freedom of conscience and religious associations." Not so long ago, a meeting of Patriarch of Moscow and all Rus Kirill with young people was held in a stadium in Moscow.

Court rules in Jehovah's Witness' favor

Tambov provincial court rules search in Jehovah's Witness home illegal

Administrative Center of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia (15.04.2010) / HRWF (21.04.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - A Tambov provincial court found the order for a search in the apartment of a Jehovah's Witness to be illegal. On 15 April 2010 the Judicial College for

Criminal Cases of the Tambov provincial court satisfied an appeal from the Cheprunov family, who are Jehovah's Witnesses.

Early in the morning of 17 March 2010, police arrived at the Cheprunov home and conducted a search, during which personal items and literature were confiscated. The search was conducted on the basis of an order of a woman judge who illegally held that religious confession was "sufficient basis" for such actions.

Mikhail and Larisa Cheprunov appealed the order, pointing out that criminal prosecution of citizens on the basis of their religious affiliation is forbidden (article 19 of the constitution of RF). All of the things that were seized during the search are to be returned to their owners.

Attorney Sergei Palagin, who represented the interests of the Cheprunov family, said after the court session: "I consider that the decision of the court has importance in principle not only for this family, but also for other believers of this confession. I think that now searches will not be conducted merely on the basis that someone is a Jehovah's Witness. At least, the Tambov provincial court has issued a decision condemning such actions as illegal and as in violation of the right of a believing person."

Roundtable on "sects" in Russia

Attorneys: Dvorkin calling ordinary Protestants "sects" unacceptable

Rosbalt Moskva (14.04.2010) / HRWF (21.04.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - It is unacceptable to use the labels "sects" and "sectarian activity" and to make accusations when talking about religious organizations, however untraditional they are, as long as they are peaceful and law-abiding. This was said on Wednesday by participants in a round table in the Moscow office of "Rosbalt," on the topic: "Life in a sect, a search for happiness, escape from reality, or protest?" According to Anatoly Pchelintsev, a famous attorney, senior partner in the advocacy group "Slavic Legal Center," and expert of the State Duma, in contemporary Russia considering protestant churches to be "sects" has sometimes caused major complications in their life. Meanwhile, according to Pchelintsev, the greater part of protestants are peaceful, law-abiding citizens of Russia who cause no harm either to their country or their fellow believers.

A special discussion ensued over the Russian Associated Union of Christians of Evangelical Faith (ROSKhVE), who are often labeled "neo-Pentecostals." The director of the St. Ireneus of Lyons Center of Religious Studies Research, Alexander Dvorkin, thinks this organization to be a typical sect, in whose congregations crimes against individuals are committed—for example, in Moscow a mother and grandmother who were Pentecostals conducted a ritual murder of a small girl.

Objecting to Dvorkin, Pchelintsev emphasized that in the case of the Moscow murder, and in several other cases (for example, the murder of a minor by sectarians in Yakutiia in 1999), the murderers were ruled by expert analysis to be psychologically ill and it is wrong to indict entire Christian churches on the basis of these tragedies. On the other hand, according to Pchelintsev, all the indicators of sectarianism are manifested in the activity of rather many Orthodox religious folk, for example, calling for people to reject the new passports and individual identification numbers. However nobody dares to accuse the Russian Orthodox Church of something on this basis.

According to Anatoly Pchelintsev's data, today there are in RF about 2,000 organizations of Christians of evangelical faith, more than 1,200 Baptist and 400 Adventist Organizations, and also more than 200 organizations of Jehovah's Witnesses. At the same time, the religious environment in Russia remains quite calm and none of the tragedies connected with the truly totalitarian sects of past years, like Aum Sinrikyo or the White Brotherhood, are now being observed.

Lawful or unlawful?

Results of expert studies reveal significant discrepancy on view of Christian literature

JW Official Media Website (08.04.2010) / HRWF (10.05.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - There exists "no basis" for saying that publications of Jehovah's Witnesses contain signs of "propaganda, exclusivity or inferiority of a person on the basis of his attitude toward religion," according to a recent court-appointed religious expert study in Asbest, Russia. Regarding such Christian literature, the study found that it does not "go beyond what is a common phenomenon for the entire religious community which is more or less typical of all religious confessions." The conclusions of that study were affirmed by religious experts from a second study who further stated regarding the publications under scrutiny that, "neither do they contain incitement to religious discord or to actions against religion, nation or individuals representing the latter."

Both expert conclusions were commissioned in relation to a criminal case brought against a member of the local religious organization of Jehovah's Witnesses in the Asbest, Sverdlovsk Region, initiated in June 19, 2008. Criminal charges were dropped on March 3, 2010, in response to the findings of the expert studies.

Among the publications in which the experts from the Asbest study did not find anything extremist in nature are three that had already been pronounced as "extremist materials" in the September 11, 2009, decision of the Rostov Regional Court and that have since been placed on the Ministry of Justice Extremist Materials List. Such contradictions highlight an inconsistency in Russia's prosecution of Jehovah's Witnesses. There is disagreement among court appointed experts whether the literature of Jehovah's Witnesses should be pronounced as "extremist material." Meanwhile, harassment and arrests of the Witnesses continue in many regions.

Mr. Vasily Kalin, Chairman of the Administrative Center of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia, noted: "In various regions of Russia attempts are being made to instigate criminal cases against Jehovah's Witnesses. But the fact that there are no grounds for the accusations is confirmed by unbiased and qualified specialists. Jehovah's Witnesses proclaim good news from the Bible because they want to share information that brings joy and comfort to people. The ultimate decision on who has the truth belongs to God and not to the State."

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Unprecedented wave of persecution against Jehovah's Witnesses

HRWF (01.04.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - An unprecedented campaign of repression has been launched against Jehovah's Witnesses by the Russian authorities, depriving them of their basic human rights: freedom of expression, freedom of assembly and freedom of worship.

Human Rights Without Frontiers urges the European Union to put this issue on the agenda of the upcoming meeting of the EU-Russia Human Rights Dialogue.

Security police break up Jehovah's Witnesses worship: FSB agents disrupt JW religious service in Altai

SOVA (25.03.2010) / HRWF (01.04.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - An FSB agent made his way to the platform of the Jehovah's Witnesses' Kingdom Hall on 28 March 2010 in Slavgorod, Altai territory, violating the order of the Jehovah's Witnesses' worship service. Detective S. Lysenko of the Directorate of the Federal Security Service [FSB] walked to the pulpit. He ordered everyone to remain in their seats and to draw up documents. Despite clear and polite objections of believers, the intelligence agents began making videos and photographs. Although the women and children were later released, they all left in a depressed state.

According to the investigative statement, "materials having operative significance were not found." However the FSB agents, without any basis, confiscated all religious literature, 1221 copies of 77 titles and dragged out this operation for more than six hours. (tr. by PDS, posted 30 March 2010)

Press Service of Administrative Center of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia, 30 March 2010

Police break up Jehovah's Witnesses' worship in Sverdlovsk

SOVA (25.03.2010) / HRWF (01.04.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - For the third time recently a worship service was broken up in Novouralsk, Sverdlov province. On 23 March 2010 police officers with video cameras burst into the premises where a Jehovah's Witnesses worship service was going on. When they were asked not to interrupt the meeting, they left, although they locked the building from the outside so that believers were not able to exit. Christian communion, an integral part of worship of God, was interrupted. The police copied the passport of everyone in attendance and took statements from them.

Last year police also broke up services of the Witnesses in the cities of Asbest and Kamyshlov. These incidents await a review in court. It is interesting that in 2007 the European Court for Human Rights condemned the actions of officials who broke up a meeting of Jehovah's Witnesses in neighboring Cheliabinsk and it assessed 30,000 Euros as compensation for moral harm suffered by the believers. (tr. by PDS, posted 26 March 2010)
Press Service of Administrative Center of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia, 26 March 2010

"E" Center in Cherepovets inspects Jehovah's Witnesses

SOVA (25.03.2010) / HRWF (01.04.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Employees of the Center for Combating Extremism of the city of Cherepovets have explained to Jehovah's Witnesses their right to remain silent and they also opened an administrative case against them "for failure to provide information."

Since 28 February 2010 employees of the Center for Combating Extremism of the city of Cherepovets have been conducting an inspection of the activity of Jehovah's Witnesses during which about 38 believers have been questioned. They all have refused to reveal information about the private lives of their acquaintances, including about their religious confession.

Police, in their turn, in an attempt to put pressure on them, have illegally opened an administrative case on the basis of article 19.7 of the Code on Administrative Law Violation ("Failure to provide information") against the last four to be questioned, which gives evidence of the degree of juridical competence of "agents of law enforcement," Major A.N. Zapankov and Captain E.A. Trifonova.

Rights advocates consider that there has recently begun an unprecedented campaign aimed at banning the activity of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia. At the present time that confession has about 160,000 actively practicing adherents, and almost the same number of persons who attend their meetings. (tr. by PDS, posted 26 March 2010)

Press Service of Administrative Center of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia. 26 March 2010

Searches in homes of Jehovah's Witnesses in Riazan province

SOVA (25.03.2010) / HRWF (01.04.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - On 24 and 25 March in Riazan and Riazan province, in the cities of Kasimov, Rybnoe, and Novomichurinsk, multiple raids were conducted by law enforcement agencies against believers who confess the religion of Jehovah's Witnesses.

In Kasimov on 24 March, around 7:00 p.m., after the conclusion of a worship service, approximately 12 police officers and 2 who accompanied them entered the hall. Almost all in attendance were questioned, including children. Addresses, passport data, and telephone numbers were recorded. Magazines, compact disks, and songbooks were seized. Similar raids were conducted in Novomichurinsk and Riazan.

Also on 24 and 25 March searches were conducted in the private homes of Alexander Russu (Riazan), Vladimir Gaivorovsky, Sergei Vinokurov (Kasimov) and Viktor Bazvanov (Novomichurinsk).

According to Alexander Russu, police officers behaved quite politely but never the less the search in his home lasted four hours and ended only at 1:30 a.m. The believer has three children. The search was conducted by Senior Lieutenant Evgeny Alekseevich Esaev and Senior Lieutenant Vitaly Kulikov. During the search religious literature, magazines, and

books, which had been collected over many years by this family, were seized. The greater portion of the confiscated literature is not included in federal lists of extremist materials. [. . .]

In the Gaivoronsky home the search is still going on. Other circumstances and details of the raids are being ascertained.

According to several eyewitnesses, the police officers expressed regret and apologized for such actions, explaining that they were only following orders. (tr. by PDS, posted 26 March 2010)

Press Service of Administrative Center of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia, 25 March 2010

Jehovah's Witnesses arrested in Dagestan

SOVA (25.03.2010) / HRWF (01.04.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Literature that a Briansk expert analysis did not find extremist and personal records have still not been returned to adherents of the Jehovah's Witnesses whom the FSB arrested in Khasaviurt on 3 March. The believers are to send a statement to the prosecutor's office. This was reported to a "Kavkazsky uzel" correspondent by Grigory Martynov, a representative of the Press Service of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia.

"The victims are planning to send a statement now. They say that everything has been returned to them except literature and several personal records. The records were removed from a notebook and scanned, but were not returned. They also reported that the wife of Ramazan Magometov, 63, was very shaken by the disappearance of her husband. All she knew, from a SMS-communication from Komliakov, was that they had been arrested and taken to the FSB department," Martynov said.

He said when the woman phoned the FSB department she was told that the detainees were not there. "An explanation was taken from them about what they were doing in the house in which they were arrested. Apparently on suspicion of extremist activity," Martynov reported to the "Kavkazsky uzel" correspondent.

He also specified that at the time of the arrest, absolutely all their literature was seized from the believers.

As "Kavkazsky uzel" has reported, on 3 March in Khasaviurt two adherents of the Jehovah's Witnesses were arrested by officers of the FSB department for Dagestan, and after more than seven hours of questioning and confiscation of the literature they were released.

At the press service of the FSB department for Dagestan, an agent who refused to identify himself explained: on 3 March adherents of the Jehovah's Witnesses "were simply invited to the regional department for a conversation" because of a telephone call reporting that "some people are going from house to house and distributing literature."

He confirmed that literature was confiscated from "those invited to the conversation" consisting of 60 pieces, although only 52 of them were under ban. Also the FSB agent said:

"The detainees were advised to surrender the literature, and they did it voluntarily, having written an explanation, after which they were released."

"The detainees themselves said that they had the literature and that they arrived in Khasaviurt in order to distribute it. They could have not said this, but they reported themselves that they are not permitted to distribute this literature on Russian territory. However for some reason this did not stop them," the FSB department for Dagestan reported.

Experts differed in their evaluation of whether there are signs of extremism in the literature. Grigory Martynov also reported that data from expert analysis regarding signs of extremism in a number of Jehovah's Witnesses' publication differ, while the latest information points to an absence of illegal elements in the organization's literature.

For example, on 2 October 2009 a governmental institution, the Briansk Laboratory of Judicial Expert Analysis of the Ministry of Justice of the Russian federation, and "YUREKSP" declared: "According to a religious studies and linguistic conclusion of a specialist of 15 April 2008, 'the texts of the Watchtower and Awake magazines and also brochures and the book Come to Jehovah contain information that clearly, unambiguously, and immediately is intended to incite hostility, propaganda of exclusivity, and disrespect for human dignity on the basis of religious identity."

The latest Briansk expert analysis, however, issued a conclusion regarding Jehovah's Witnesses' literature that said that "the wording used in the text of the publications examined does not express humiliating characteristics, negative emotional assessments, and negative statements regarding any ethnic or racial group or individuals representing one," and "it does not contain information inciting actions against any nation or race, or individuals representing one."

Experts also have recognized that the texts of the publications submitted do not use special linguistic or other means for deliberate communication of humiliating characteristics, negative emotional assessments, and negative statements or inducements to actions against any nation, race, or religion, or individuals representing it.

The conclusion of the experts said "the texts of the publications submitted do not contain expressions evidencing religious intolerance."

According to Martynov, among the literature that was seized on 3 March in Dagestan and still not returned are those books about which the above cited expert analysis was made. "Among the publications that were studied by the Briansk Laboratory and in which nothing 'extremist' was found are two publications that were seized from believers in Khasaviurt," Martynov said.

A statement to the prosecutor's office of the republic about this fact and also about the incident of arrest should be sent in the near future.

School children are being frightened about the Jehovah's Witnesses in the provinces of Russia.

Grigory Martynov also reported that recently the Press Service of the Administrative Center of Jehova's Witnesses in Russia received a letter from Ana Bazarova, a pupil of the eighth grade of middle school No. 12 of the city of Staryi Oskol, Belgorod province, in which she wrote: "On 9 February 2010 in the class on Orthodox culture, a film about Jehovah's

Witnesses was shown. I did not go to this class on the basis of religious convictions, but I know about the film from the words of classmates. The film indicated that Jehovah's Witnesses kill people. To my question 'And did you believe this?' my classmates answered: 'Yes, we believed it.' Only one classmate said that she did not believe it, since she has studied the Bible with her grandmother and knows Jehovah's Witnesses," the pupil's letter reports.

"This is not the first time that inter-religious strife has been sown in the schools in Belgorod province." [. . .] What happened sharply differs from the words of the chairman of the editorial college of the "Foundations of Orthodox Culture" textbook, Andrei Kuraev, who declared the principle: "You may state your own beliefs, but do not speak critically nor say that our faith is better than our neighbor's," Grigory Martynov reported to the "Kavkazsky uzel" correspondent.

Recently, pressure on Jehovah's Witnesses in various regions of the Russian federation has increased. At the end of December 2009 in Adygei printed materials of the Jehovah's Witnesses were confiscated. At the end of last year and the beginning of the current, attacks on houses of worship of the Witnesses, which the believers themselves call "Kingdom Halls," have occurred in Volzhsk and Sochi. [. . .]

Representatives of civil society have issued statements in which they call Russian authorities to cease the practice of persecution of the Jehovah's Witnesses religious organizations and of other "nontitular" religious communities in Russia and to guarantee the protection of the believers from illegal persecution. (tr. by PDS, posted 26 March 2010)

Russian original posted on SOVA site, 25 March 2010

General source: Stetson University/ Russia Religion News.

Islamic militant admits Moscow massacre and warns of more

Peter Dominiczak

London Evening Standard (01.04.2010) / HRWF (02.04.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - A Chechen militant chief has claimed responsibility for the suicide bombings on Moscow's subway that left 39 dead.

Islamic extremist Doku Umarov said in an internet video that the attacks were revenge for the killing of civilians by Russian security forces.

His statement on a pro-rebel website appeared after Prime Minister Vladimir Putin vowed to "drag out of the sewer" the terrorists behind Monday's twin attack, which also wounded scores of commuters in the morning rush hour.

Funerals for most of the victims were being held in the Russian capital today. The bombings were the first there for six years.

Umarov, 45, head of militant groups in Chechnya and other regions in the North Caucasus, blamed ordinary Russians for ignoring the slaughter of civilians and warned of more attacks.

"I promise you the war will come to your streets and you will feel it in your lives, feel it on your own skin," he said.

Security forces refused to comment on Umarov's claim but have already said they believed that militants from the Caucasus were to blame.

Umarov had earlier warned: "If Russians think the war is happening only on television, somewhere far away in the Caucasus where it can't reach them, then we are going to show them that this war will return to their homes."

He has fought Russian forces during both separatist wars in Chechnya over the last 15 years. He took over the leadership of the rebel movement in 2006 after soldiers killed predecessor Abdul-Khalim Sadulayev.

Umarov's importance grew that year after Shamil Basayev, the most feared of the rebels, was also killed. Basayev was behind terrorist attacks on Russia during its wars in Chechnya, including the hostage-taking raid on a school in the town of Beslan in 2004.

Moscow has been on high alert since the subway attacks, with roadblocks and security precautions increased. In a separate outrage, at least 12 people were killed by two suicide bombings in Russia's North Caucasus republic of Dagestan.

A car bomb was detonated yesterday in the town of Kizlyar and another bomber blew himself up as a crowd gathered. So far no one has claimed responsibility for the Dagestan blasts.

Fire in Jehovah's Witnesses' building

New arson of house of worship?

Russia Religion News (25.03.2010) / HRWF (31.03.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - In the night of 20 March 2010, fire broke out in the Jehovah's Witnesses "Kingdom Hall", with a capacity of 160 persons, in the city of Budennovsk, Stavropol territory. No one was injured but the ceiling and audience seats burned. One possible cause is arson committed by a criminal who entered the attic through a door above the fire escape. Believers submitted to the police a request for opening a criminal case.

The building already had been the object of vandalism. Thus, some time earlier, vandals broke into the yard and painted a star of David on the wall. This was not the first such incident after the decision of the court liquidating the Jehovah's Witnesses local religion organization of Taganrog, Rostov province. A bottle with inflammable liquid was thrown into the Kingdom Hall of Volzhsk in the night of 1 January 2010.

Source: Press service of the Administrative Center of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia.

Police confiscate religious literature from homes of believers

JW Official Website (26.03.2010) / HRWF (30.03.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - "When the police showed up at our house early in the morning, it struck me that I have reason to fear for my freedom and the welfare of my children." Larisa Cheprunova, whose home was searched, was shocked by what happened. "We have always respected the authorities, but the officers treated us like criminals; they spoke rudely, took our belongings and literature, and scared our children!"

At approximately 7 a.m. on March 17, 2010, three groups of policemen arrived simultaneously at three homes occupied by four families of Jehovah's Witnesses living in the city of Tambov. The residents were awakened by the police who, with court orders in hand, were there to search the homes. The officers confiscated personal libraries, taking all Bible literature as well as business documents, computers, electronic data, even family photo albums and personal correspondence. These events took place shortly after another update of the Federal List of Extremist Materials to which new publications of Jehovah's Witnesses had been added.

The court order was based on a recent case initiated under Article 282 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation, "Inciting Hatred or Hostility, and the Debasing of Human Dignity." In response to the motion filed by Investigator Igor Avdeyev, a ruling was issued by Judge Lyudmila Ryazantseva of the Leninskiy District Court of the City of Tambov that authorized the search. According to the ruling, the officers should confiscate "objects, literature, electronic media advocating religious hatred as well as. . . other documents recording the activity of the religious organization."

During the search the police did not inform the householders of their rights, provide them with a copy of the court order authorizing the search, or allow them to contact a lawyer. In some cases the householders were not allowed to use their personal telephones. During the search of the Cheprunovs' apartment, the raised voices of the police officers scared the family's young daughter, who started to cry and plead that the police not take her parents away from her. Police searching another home, that of the Tagayev family, confiscated a copy of the New Testament published in Moscow in 1988 as well as publications of Jehovah's Witnesses.

Vasiliy Kalin, Chairman of the Administrative Center of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia, who lived through the time of repression and experienced firsthand religious persecution, stated the following: "What has happened in Tambov reminds us of those difficult times in the past when based on slanderous reports and false accusations as well as in the absence of any grounds, Jehovah's Witnesses were deprived of their property and criminally prosecuted. Back then the KGB officers came late at night or early in the morning, searched the houses, took away literature and personal belongings. What's happening now is all too familiar, too much like what happened in 1951 when such actions on a large scale ultimately led thousands of Jehovah's Witnesses to be deported to Siberia."

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Raids, literature confiscations and criminal case in Tambov

By Geraldine Fagan and Felix Corley

Forum 18 (22.03.2010) / HRWF (25.03.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - In what appears to be the first police sweep on Jehovah's Witness homes in post-Soviet Russia, three flats in the town of Tambov south-east of Moscow were raided on the morning of 17 March, Forum 18 News Service has learnt. At one, the six-hour search prevented the children – one of them an 8-year-old girl – from going to school, Jehovah's Witness press secretary Grigory Martynov told Forum 18 from St Petersburg on 19 March. Although police made no threat to arrest her parents, the 8-year-old girl was so frightened she "pleaded with the police not to take her parents away", he added.

Investigator Igor Avdeyev, who is leading the investigation and initiated the search warrants, confirmed to Forum 18 from Tambov on 22 March that he has opened a criminal case under Article 282 Part 1 (incitement to hatred or hostility or denigration of an individual's human worth on the basis of religious affiliation), which carries a maximum two-year prison term. He said the case is over the "fact of distribution by Jehovah's Witnesses of extremist material", but "at present it is not against specific individuals".

However, Avdeyev declined absolutely to discuss further "the course of the investigation", including who had taken the initiative to launch the case and why the Jehovah's Witness community is being presented as having committed crimes without a trial having taken place. Jehovah's Witnesses denied to Forum 18 that any of their literature is extremist.

Avdeyev was quoted by Russian media websites on 17 March as maintaining that some 100 people had distributed banned Jehovah's Witness literature and would be interrogated in the near future.

Jehovah's Witnesses and readers of Muslim theologian Said Nursi have been particular victims of government action against alleged religious "extremism", with many of their works being branded "extremist" and those who distribute them subject to prosecution.

And in the town of Kaluga south-west of Moscow, armed police with dogs raided the Sunday morning service of a Lutheran congregation on 28 February, allegedly following up on a report that they had "extremist" literature (see forthcoming F18News article).

Tambov raids and criminal case

Viewed by Forum 18, a 17 March police protocol of one of the Tambov searches gives its aim as confiscation of "items of literature and electronic devices propagandising religious hatred, as well as other documentation recording activity by the religious group 'Jehovah's Witnesses'". Poorly legible, seized items it records fill over four pages, for the most part numerous issues of the tracts "Watchtower" and "Awake!". Also included are some of the 52 titles recently outlawed nationwide by their addition to the Federal List of Extremist Materials, such as the books "Come Be My Follower" and "Draw Near to Jehovah".

According to the Jehovah's Witnesses, the police showed but refused to leave search warrants - issued by Judge Lyudmila Ryazantseva of Tambov's Lenin District Court at the instigation of Investigator Avdeyev. The warrants referred to the opening of a criminal case under Article 282 of the Criminal Code ("incitement of ethnic, racial or religious hatred").

Premises in Tambov rented by the Jehovah's Witnesses for worship were also searched by police on the morning of 17 March without any of their members present, Martynov told Forum 18. A safe storing equipment used at the congregation's meetings was broken open and a number of musical recordings seized, he added.

Forum 18 was unable to find out why such extensive house searches were ordered on Jehovah's Witnesses, nor why copies of the search warrants were not given to the victims. "These were not raids but searches," Aleksandr Ulyanov of the press office of Tambov Regional Police told Forum 18 on 22 March. He said the decision to conduct the searches was taken by a court, but refused to say by telephone why copies of search warrants were not given or to answer any other questions. Forum 18 followed up with the same question in writing, but did not get an immediate response.

Judge Ryazantseva refused to discuss any aspect of the case with Forum 18 on 22 March and put the phone down.

Unlike in previous cases with Nursi readers and other Jehovah's Witnesses, where literature seizures were conducted illegally, police in Tambov appear to have followed procedure by seizing literature related to a specific investigation and providing a record of the literature seized.

Accusations portrayed as fact

The criminal case against the Tambov Jehovah's Witnesses was also widely reported on government websites, including those of the Tambov Regional Internal Affairs Directorate, the Russian Interior Ministry and the Tambov Regional Investigation Directorate of the Procuracy. The reports all speak of the Jehovah's Witnesses in Tambov as having committed crimes, with the only thrust of the investigation to identify those who have specifically committed these offences.

The website of Tambov Internal Affairs Directorate noted on 19 March that "very serious" legal work had preceded the "operational work" to "unmask and halt these illegal activities". It said the basic work of expert analysis of Jehovah's Witness works was conducted by Tatyana Pronina of the Centre for Religious Studies at Tambov State University, who found "features allowing them to be considered extremist materials". In particular she said they maintain the superiority of one religion over another and refusal to accept state symbols or "generally accepted family values".

Investigator Avdeyev confirmed to Forum 18 that Pronina had written the expert assessment and said he will probably engage her to conduct a further expert analysis of the specific books confiscated on 17 March.

Pronina told Forum 18 from Tambov on 22 March that the Tambov Internal Affairs Directorate's Centre to Counter Religious Extremism had commissioned the expert analysis of the Jehovah's Witness literature as part of its contract with her Centre. She said her Centre had received payment for the analysis, not herself.

Asked whether it was not natural that one religious community might assert that its beliefs were superior to those of other faiths, Pronina responded: "Indeed, every faith regards itself as superior. But we're talking about the law."

Pronina has often spoken at "anti-sect" meetings organised in Tambov, including by the local Russian Orthodox diocese, as she explained to Forum 18. However, she declined to specify

what religious affiliation she might have. "It is in my capacity as religious studies specialist that I did the expert analysis," she insisted. She rejected any suggestion that her expert analysis forms part of any official moves to ban, prosecute or imprison any Jehovah's Witnesses. "I'm not part of a campaign against them," she claimed.

Tambov raids part of wider crackdown

Jehovah's Witnesses believe the law enforcement agencies are pursuing a total ban of their organisation. In February 2009, an unprecedented nationwide sweep on Jehovah's Witness communities - resulting in at least 500 check-ups - was ordered by the General Public Prosecutor's Office. On 8 December, the Supreme Court upheld an 11 September ruling by Rostov-on-Don Regional Court outlawing 34 Jehovah's Witness titles as extremist, the first successful out of several regional court cases seeking to do so.

Added to the Federal List on 1 March, these titles are now banned from distribution across Russia, as are a further 18 banned in an analogous case in the Altai Republic and added to the list on 15 March. Mass distribution, preparation or storage with the aim of mass distribution of titles banned as extremist may result in prosecution under Criminal Code Article 282 ("incitement of ethnic, racial or religious hatred"), whose penalties range from a fine to up to five years in prison. However, the authorities may instead choose to prosecute under Article 20.29 of the Administrative Violations Code ("production and distribution of extremist material"), whose penalties range from a fine to up to 15 days' detention.

Jehovah's Witnesses have told Forum 18 of brief detentions of their adherents across Russia (see forthcoming F18News article). In Krasnodar Region of southern Russia, a court has fined two Jehovah's Witnesses and ordered confiscated literature destroyed, believed to be the first such court-ordered Jehovah's Witness literature destruction in post-Soviet Russia (see forthcoming F18News article).

More harassment in Taganrog

The September 2009 Rostov-on-Don decision also dissolved the local Jehovah's Witness organisation in Taganrog. Its head Nikolai Trotsyuk and three female members were separately summoned for questioning on 12 March by the town's assistant public prosecutor, Aleksei Venikov, according to the Jehovah's Witnesses. Trotsyuk refused to answer questions, instead asking in writing why he was being questioned, St Petersburg-based Jehovah's Witness lawyer Viktor Zhenkov told Forum 18 on 19 March. The women - including 75-year-old Valentina Sherstobitova - agreed to be questioned, he added, and were asked about their motivations for preaching and distributing literature.

Venikov refused absolutely to give "any comment" by phone. "I'm governed by official procedure," he told Forum 18 on 22 March. However, he insisted that in these cases "I am fulfilling my official duties".

Zhenkov also confirmed that bailiffs evicted Jehovah's Witnesses from and sealed the Taganrog organisation's Kingdom Hall - confiscated by the Rostov-on-Don ruling - on 1 March. Numbering up to 800 and previously using the Hall in groups of up to 100, according to Jehovah's Witness press secretary Martynov, the congregation is now being refused rented premises throughout Taganrog due to the ban, Zhenkov told Forum 18.

Asbest case closed

Meanwhile, in an isolated victory for the Jehovah's Witnesses, the first local extremism case brought against them has finally been closed. Viewed by Forum 18, the 3 March order closing the case notes that while four items of Jehovah's Witness literature seized from the congregation in the asbestos-mining town of Asbest (Sverdlovsk [Yekaterinburg] Region) are on the Federal List of Extremist Materials, there is no evidence of their distribution. The order is signed by Aleksandr Blyudenov, Investigator for Especially Important Cases at the Department for Investigation of Especially Important Cases within the Investigation Department of the Investigation Committee attached to Sverdlovsk Regional Public Prosecutor's Office.

As part of the Asbest investigation, a 53-page December 2009 court study by three Bryansk-based Justice Ministry experts examined literature seized from the congregation in February 2008. Seen by Forum 18, it finds no signs of extremism in the literature, including six items now on the Federal List: "Draw Near to Jehovah", "What Does God Require of Us?", "Jehovah's Witnesses - Who Are They? What Do They Believe?" and "Spirits of the Dead", as well as the February and April 2007 monthly issues of "Awake!". The case was originally opened in June 2008.

As of 15 March, the Federal List runs to 573 items. One Jehovah's Witness title - "What Does God Require of Us?" - appears twice, as Gorno-Altaysk City Court banned the 1996 edition and the Rostov-on-Don court the 2003 edition.

Criminal charges against readers of religious literature

By Felix Corley, and Geraldine Fagan

Forum 18 (04.03.2010) / HRWF (10.03.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Email: info@hrwf.net - For the first time in Russia to Forum 18 News Service's knowledge, formal criminal charges have been brought against readers of the works of the late Turkish Muslim theologian Said Nursi. Three of the four were detained for up to 36 hours amid mass raids by the local FSB security service in the Siberian city of Krasnoyarsk on 16-17 February. Many Russian translations of Nursi's works feature on the Federal List of Extremist Materials, making their distribution a criminal offence.

Aleksei Gerasimov, one of the four Nursi readers, told Forum 18 from Krasnoyarsk on 3 March that it is unclear how long the FSB's investigation will last and when any trial will take place.

Only he and the three others are facing charges, he added, although 20 private homes were raided on the night of 16-17 February. Religious literature was confiscated from all, including Korans and other books as well as Nursi works. In Gerasimov's case, all 14 volumes of Nursi's Koranic commentary "Risale-i Nur" ("Messages of Light") in Turkish and seven books in Russian were confiscated, he told Forum 18.

Strong doubts have been raised about the legality of some literature seizures. Two lawyers working separately on religious freedom cases have told Forum 18 that it is unlawful for the authorities to take religious literature without formally recording this. To continue to hold the literature, the authorities must conduct an investigation which either results in criminal or administrative proceedings, or the literature being handed back (see forthcoming F18News article).

Krasnoyarsk raids

Gerasimov said that state representatives searched his flat "in a proper manner". However, statements viewed by Forum 18 from five others raided claim rougher treatment.

Dated 19 February, Roman Gavrusik's account describes how, after 11pm on 16 February, a masked and armed group burst into a Krasnoyarsk flat where he and other Nursi readers were meeting. The state representatives pushed those present to the floor and forced them to lie face down with their hands behind their heads for some four hours, he writes, also hitting or kicking several even though they offered no resistance. Later taken to the local FSB headquarters, the Nursi readers were made to stand against a wall with their hats covering their faces for two hours. An interrogator threatened Gavrusik with detention, a four-year prison term and harm to his family if he did not admit to leading "some sect": "He also said he had killed people like me in Chechnya".

Statements by Nazim Balamirzoyev , Yevgeny Petry and Yevgeny Tarasov – present at the same raid – concur with Gavrusik's. Balamirzoyev adds that the Nursi readers were sworn at and insulted, including as "terrorists and separatists". Tarasov – who is ethnically Tatar – says he was called a "parasite" and asked: "How can you, a Russian, betray Russia by becoming a Muslim?"

Russian translations of "Risale-i Nur" were controversially banned as extremist by a Moscow court in May 2007. "Nurdzhular" – which Nursi readers insist does not exist – was banned as an extremist organisation by the Supreme Court in April 2008. Countering the claims of Nursi critics in Russia that his work is banned in Turkey, a top Turkish religious affairs official stated in March 2007 that the 14 books of "Risale-i Nur" "do not pose any harm whatsoever from a religious and social point of view".

The latest March 2010 additions to the Federal List of Extremist Materials include all 34 of the latest Jehovah's Witness publications declared "extremist" in a Rostov-on-Don court ruling, upheld by the Supreme Court in December 2009 (see forthcoming F18News article).

Krasnoyarsk criminal charges

Vladimir Ruban, the assistant head of Krasnoyarsk regional FSB's Investigation Department, signed the criminal charge against the four Nursi readers on 26 February. The four – Gerasimov and Petry, as well as Fizuli Askarov and Andrei Dedkov – are accused of violating Article 282.2 Part 1 of the Criminal Code ("organising activity by a banned religious or other association"), which carries a maximum penalty of three years' imprisonment.

The charge against Gerasimov, seen by Forum 18, claims that in 2006 he and the three others began a religious organisation and the joint reading of Nursi's works. It describes Nursi readers as "members of a criminal group".

Even after the 2008 Supreme Court ban, the document adds, the four continued "organised activity" by the banned group, including by "distributing extremist literature" and "conspiracy". The charge echoes the wording of the resolution opening the criminal case.

Gerasimov told Forum 18 that the charges against the other three are similarly worded.

Ruban's telephone at the FSB went unanswered each time Forum 18 called on 3 and 4 March.

Dagestan investigation "dragging on"

Meanwhile, two Nursi readers in the North Caucasus republic of Dagestan, Ziyautdin Dapayev and Ruslan Bulatov, are still being investigated under Article 282.2, Part 2 of the Criminal Code ("participation in a banned religious extremist organisation"), which carries a maximum penalty of two years' imprisonment. The investigation has been underway since mid-December 2009, when homes associated with Nursi readers in three Dagestani towns were subjected to armed raids.

Complaining that the investigation is "dragging on", Dapayev claimed that this was because the authorities have no proof of any wrongdoing. "Our lawyer told us we could easily win any case," he told Forum 18 on 3 March. "Of course we read Nursi's works – they teach us to understand our faith. But they want to brand us as terrorists."

Jehovah's Witnesses address their fellow citizens

JW Official Website (25.02.2010) / HRWF Int. (11.03.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Email: info@hrwf.net - On February 26-28, 2010, throughout Russia, from the Chukchi Peninsula in the east to Kaliningrad in the west, a special campaign is taking place. For these three days, tens of thousands of Russian Jehovah's Witnesses are offering their fellow citizens a tract entitled Could It Happen Again? A Question for the Citizens of Russia. Twelve million tracts will be distributed.

Why did they decide to address this particular question? The Chairman of the Presiding Committee of the Administrative Center of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia, Vasily Kalin, said: "Sixty years ago in the Soviet Union, Jehovah's Witnesses experienced an unprecedented wave of persecution and repression. Lately, a new wave, a systematic campaign of harassment is being carried out against Jehovah's Witnesses; this time, some want to classify our literature and activity as extremist. Our meetings for worship are raided; worshippers are illegally detained, questioned, and searched. Their personal possessions are confiscated. In view of the seriousness of this situation, we, Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia, consider it necessary to provide our fellow citizens, not excluding government officials, with accurate information about ourselves, as well as about cases of the religious intolerance that we have encountered."

International concern has been expressed over the growing intolerance of religious freedom in Russia even though the Russian Constitution guarantees this fundamental human right. On January 20, 2010, an appeal, signed by more than 40 human rights experts in Russia and throughout Eastern Europe, was sent to the highest Russian authorities, urging an end to the harassment and repression that Jehovah's Witnesses are subjected to.

The last page of the tract states: "The tactics of innuendo and slander need not work on you. We hope that you will make the effort to see through such empty talk."

The tract can be read online in English(http://www.jw-media.org/rus/publications/t83_e.pdf) and in Russian(http://www.jw-russia.org/publications/t83/article01_u.htm)

Three more readers of Muslim theologian detained

Geraldine Fagan

Forum 18 (23.02.2010) / HRWF (03.03.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Email: info@hrwf.net - Following simultaneous raids on 20 homes in Krasnoyarsk on the night of 16-17 February by Russia's FSB security service, three readers of the late Turkish Muslim theologian Said Nursi were detained for some 36 hours, Forum 18 News Service has learnt. They and a fourth Nursi reader could now face religious extremism charges carrying a maximum three-year jail term. "These accusations of extremism are incomprehensible and ridiculous," Aleksei Gerasimov, one of those detained, told Forum 18 after his detention. "On the contrary, the Islam we're studying teaches deeper knowledge of the Most High, honesty, sincerity, how to help people and become a better person." Akhmad Kalobayev, the detained Muslims' lawyer, told Forum 18 that no formal charges have yet been brought, and he thought that court proceedings might not begin for some time. The Krasnoyarsk events follow similar raids and detentions in Dagestan in December 2009. Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia are also reporting a significant increase in brief police detentions since December.

Following simultaneous night raids on 20 homes by Russia's FSB security service in the Siberian city of Krasnoyarsk on 16-17 February, three readers of the late Turkish theologian Said Nursi were detained for some 36 hours, Forum 18 News Service has learnt. They and a fourth reader could now face religious extremism charges carrying a maximum three-year jail term. "These accusations of extremism are incomprehensible and ridiculous," Aleksei Gerasimov, one of those detained, told Forum 18 from Krasnoyarsk on 22 February. "On the contrary, the Islam we're studying teaches deeper knowledge of the Most High, honesty, sincerity, how to help people and become a better person."

Gerasimov and fellow Nursi readers Fizuli Askarov, Yevgeny Petry and Andrei Dedkov – who was not detained – are suspected of co-ordinating activity by "Nurdzhular", controversially banned as an extremist religious organisation by Russia's Supreme Court on 10 April 2008. The Krasnoyarsk events follow similar raids and detentions in the North Caucasus republic of Dagestan in December 2009.

Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia have experienced a significant increase in brief police detentions since Russia's Supreme Court labelled 34 items of their literature extremist in December (see forthcoming article). Mikhail Odintsov of the office of Russia's Human Rights Ombudsman characterised their overall situation as "threatening", maintaining that "reverse Sovietisation" was taking place.

According to Gerasimov, from four to seven state representatives conducted each of the 20 raids in Krsanoyarsk, beginning at approximately 11pm on 16 February; some identified themselves as FSB while others – masked and armed – did not. Those searching his flat did so "in a proper manner", he reported, but others acted "unpleasantly", such as by placing copies of the Koran on the floor. Those searching Gerasimov's flat seized titles from "Risale-i Nur" ("Messages of Light") - Nursi's collection of Koranic commentaries banned as extremist by Moscow's Koptevo District Court on 21 May 2007. In other cases they removed all Islamic literature - including the Koran - as well as computers, he told Forum 18. None of the confiscated items have been returned.

Subsequently detained by the FSB, Gerasimov refused to answer their questions. Petly was told that he and Gerasimov – ethnic Russians - are "traitors" for adopting Islam, he continued; overall, the interrogation suggested that the FSB were acting to implement the

Supreme Court ban on "Nurdzhular". The three were released at 4pm on 18 February after pledging not to leave the locality.

Viewed by Forum 18, protocols drawn up between 3.30am and 4.35am on 17 February confirm Krasnoyarsk Regional FSB's detention of Gerasimov, Petly and Askarov and their transfer to a local temporary detention facility. Signed by all three, Gerasimov's and Petly's state that they were held on suspicion of organising activity by "Nurdzhular", and that they deny this and object to their detention. Askarov's does not detail his alleged crime.

Also speaking from Krasnoyarsk on 22 February, Akhmad Kalobayev, the detained Muslims' lawyer, told Forum 18 that no formal charges have yet been brought. While he expected their issue by the end of February, he thought that court proceedings might not begin for some time.

Viewed by Forum 18, a 15 February official resolution signed by the assistant head of Krasnoyarsk Regional FSB's investigation department, Vladimir Ruban, orders the opening of a criminal case against Askarov, Dedkov, Gerasimov and Petry for violating Article 282.2, Part 1 of the Criminal Code (organising activity by a banned religious or other association). Specifically, the document accuses the four of "organising the activity of a religious association for the joint profession of faith and study of books from the 'Risale-i Nur' collection of writings by Said Nursi, spiritual leader of the international religious association 'Nurdzhular'". Since the beginning of 2006, it maintains, the four formed a network of 12 study centres at flats in Krasnoyarsk city, where "religious lessons take place during which members of the association jointly study books from the 'Risale-i Nur' collection of writings (..) and perform religious rites." The suspects are also alleged to have translated into Russian, published and distributed Nursi's works, and to have attracted new "adepts" through "gradual psychological processing – the formation of a positive attitude towards death together with readiness for self-sacrifice in the interests of doctrine; propaganda of superiority and inferiority of citizens due to their attitude towards religion; enmity between Muslims and non-believers".

Vladimir Ruban's telephone went unanswered when Forum 18 rang on 19 February. 22 and 23 February are public holidays in Russia.

Defence of Nursi's works

Added to the Federal List of Extremist Materials after being outlawed, the Russian translations of "Risale-i Nur" are now banned throughout Russia. Even before the verdict, Russia's Ombudsman for Human Rights denounced the trial: "No form of opposition to citizens due to their choice of world view (religious or non-religious) is contained in the books and brochures, still less calls for religious hatred and intolerance," Vladimir Lukin declared. "It is very important that we do not allow interference in the convictions and beliefs of millions of citizens on the poorly grounded, unproven pretext of fighting against extremism, as this really could provoke wide-scale violations of their right to freedom of belief." Top Muslim leader Ravil Gainutdin has described the ban as "a crude violation of freedom of conscience in our country".

Koptevo District Court met in closed session and its seven-page ruling did not cite any evidence for the psychologists' and linguists' conclusions on which the ban rests, such as that Nursi's work "propagandises hatred between Muslims and non-believers". Among the strongest evidence against "Risale-i Nur" found by psychologists and psychiatrists in a 2006 analysis for a similar case opened in Tatarstan was that Nursi's reference to a prophecy about Jesus' Second Coming as the fulfilment of sharia law "discredits the religious value of

Christianity as a religion" and that his reference to "the sword of strong faith" was "a concept of opposition and war which could lead to defensive behaviour".

Nursi opponents in Russia frequently cite an alleged ban in Turkey on both the theologian's works and "Nurdzhular" - a russification of "Nurcular", Turkish for "Nursi followers". However, official Turkish government documents recently viewed by Forum 18 counter this claim. A 1960 ruling by Afyon City Court in western Turkey notes that books of the "Risale-i Nur" collection "were published with state permission and are permitted to be freely bought and sold". It also notes - as today's Nursi readers in Russia allege - that "not a scrap of evidence was found to suggest that the defendants were gathering in pursuit of anything other than religious aims, or organised any form of society by the name of Nurdzhular (..) it was [therefore] ascertained that the only thing linking these people labelled Nurdzhular is spiritual unity as a result of reading the same books."

A 30 March 2007 statement signed by Mehmet Görmez, vice-chair of Turkey's governmental Presidency of Religious Affairs (Diyanet Isleri Baskanligi), likewise finds that the 14 books of "Risale-i Nur" "do not pose any harm whatsoever from a religious and social point of view".

Intermittent state action against Nursi readers occurred in Tatarstan and elsewhere in Russia both before and after the bans on "Risale-i Nur" and "Nurdzhular". Latterly, prominent officials in Tatarstan have expressed doubt about such action to Forum 18, especially after some 50 Turkish teachers in the republic were refused visa extensions to work in secular Tatar-Turkish lycees with a high reputation among the local government elite.

Extremist ruling overturned

On 1 February Gorodishchensk District Court (Penza Region) overturned extremism rulings on two Islamic titles "Monotheism. Path from Darkness to Light", edited by Volga Muslim board leader Mufti Mukaddas Bibarsov, and "Good for Good, Evil for Evil" by Idris Galyautdinov, imam of the main mosque in Naberezhnyye Chelny (Tatarstan), Muslim news website Ansar.ru reported. The publications no longer appear on the Federal List of Extremist Materials, which currently runs to 490 titles.

Orthodox church to receive government money for faith-based services

God on state aid

by Vera Kholmogorova, Evgeniia Pismennaia, Natalia Kostenko

Vedomosti (17.02.2010) / HRWF (23.02.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Email: info@hrwf.net - The right of religious organizations to state aid is provided by amendments put forward by the United Russia party in a presidential draft law regarding support for noncommercial organizations, which will be introduced for second reading, Vedomosti was informed in the State Duma Profile Committee for Affairs of Public Organizations. Religious organizations also will receive the "socially oriented" status. According to the chairman of the committee, Sergei Popov, the committee will review the amendments on 19 February and the second reading is scheduled for 26 February.

In the original version of the law on supplementary state support, religious organizations, along with political parties and state corporations, were explicitly excluded. Usually deputies do not introduce amendments into presidential draft laws, but a Kremlin official said that the presidential administration prepared this one. According to him, it received such an assignment after the Russian Orthodox church sent a request to the president. This is merely an extension to churches of several privileges that other noncommercial organizations have, Vedomosti's source added. The Ministry of Economic Development, which prepared the law, also agreed with the amendments, the agency's worker explained.

A bureaucrat who is acquainted with the course of discussion of the draft law said that originally religious organizations were not included in the law because of worries that they would create new legal entities and drain off a substantial amount of financial support which would violate the very essence of the church, which is supposed to be engaged in worship services. But in the end a second point of view triumphed: to stimulate religious organizations to be engaged in charitable activity, Vedomosti's source reported. It was the Russian Orthodox church that lobbied for introducing the amendments, a State Duma deputy said.

After the adoption of these amendments, parishes of the RPTs will be able to claim, on a priority basis, money designated by the government for prevention of abortions and support of young families, United Russia Duma deputy Sergei Markov, explained, and it will become easier for them to get housing. Religious organizations even now have tax privileges, says partner Denis Shchekin; they do not pay taxes on property and land, and are partially exempt from paying tariffs and taxes on profits, and contributions are not subject to taxes. He said that inclusion of religious organizations among socially oriented associations is explained by the desire to simplify access to budgetary funds for them.

The law does not provide for automatic grants of privileges to all religious organizations, RPTs legal consultant Kseniia Chernega emphasizes. Naturally a selection will be made. She said that claims for support will first be made by those parishes that are engaged in charitable activity, helping the needy and homeless. (tr. by PDS, posted 17 February 2010)

Not all religious organizations will be able to claim state aid

Interfax (17.02.2010) / HRWF (23.02.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Email: info@hrwf.net - New legislative amendments do not provide that all religious organizations, without exception, will be given the right to state support, legal consultant of the Moscow patriarchate Sister Ksenia Chernega declared.

"The draft law does not provide automatic granting to a religious organization of the socially oriented status. An organization will be recognized as such and will receive state support only in the case that it is included in a special register that will be done by authorized state agencies," K. Chernega told an "Interfax-Religiia" correspondent on Wednesday.

She said, "by no means will all religious organizations be entered in such registers, but only those that satisfy the requirements of the law and really are directly performing social activity." [. . .]

As the patriarchate's jurist noted, the status of socially oriented organizations, and therefore, state aid will be able to be claimed by those parishes, monasteries, and annexes of the Russian church that conduct charitable and social activity directly, without the creation of specialized organizations.

For example, according to the agency's source, many monasteries, of which in Russia there are about 50, have within their structure orphanages that are not registered as independent legal entities. In Moscow there are separate religious organizations that provide charitable meals for the need and they give shelter to the homeless.

K. Chernega indicated that, according to the amendment, religious organizations receiving state aid will be required to account publicly for the proper use of the financial resources received.

"Besides financial aid, they will also be able to get property on a privileged basis that does not have religious uses but is intended specifically for social activity, such as buildings of charitable dining rooms and orphanages. In addition, they will be able to provide help for groups, including voluntary ones," she added. (tr. by PDS, posted 17 February 2010)

Russian state Duma begins work on draft law for state financial support of selected religious organizations

Portal-credo.ru (16.02.2010) / HRWF (23.02.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Email: info@hrwf.net - The State Duma of the Russian federation has decided to classify as "socially oriented noncommercial organizations" religious organizations that are entered into a special register, "LifeNews" reports. Upon adoption of the document, societies that are entered into the special register will be able to count on substantial financial support from the state, allocation of property, and tax privileges.

"Religious organizations, just like noncommercial organizations, are engaged in charitable work. Thus they have the right to those same privileges that the other socially oriented organizations have," the head of the Duma Committee on Affairs of Public Associations and Religious Organizations, Sergei Popov, told "LifeNews" on 16 February.

He said that the document will be adopted on second reading at the beginning of March. The RPTsMP lobbied for the amendment and expects it. "Religious organizations that are engaged in charitable services are the ones that primarily need the new status," explained the legal consultant of the Moscow patriarchate Sister Kseniia. "We have around 50 parishes and monasteries that sponsor orphanages. In the event they receive the status of socially oriented noncommercial organizations, they will be able to count on premises for these same orphanages and tax privileges."

She noted that to get on the register, many organizations will have to "fill out a whole stack of documents and even register their own orphanages." Attorneys of RPTsMP will be ready to deal with this immediately after the adoption of the law. (tr. by PDS, posted 17 February 2010)

Source: Stetson University Russian Religion News

New bill drafted to put curbs on missionary activities with minors in Russia

Interfax (16.02.2010) / HRWF (22.02.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Email: info@hrwf.net - A bill has been drafted to put curbs on missionary work conducted by religious groups with minors in Russia, the Justice Ministry has announced.

"A bill amending the Law on the Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations and the Code of Administrative Offenses has been developed and will be submitted to the government," the ministry said in a press release.

The bill aims to give a legal definition of the term 'missionary activities' and to put curbs on religious organizations' missionary work with regards to minors.

In addition to this, the bill limits missionary activities which involves offers of material, social and other benefits for the sake of drawing citizens to religious organizations.

Russian Orthodox Church to increase role in army

RFE/RL (04.02.2010) / HRWF (10.02.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Email: info@hrwf.net - Russian Orthodox Patriarch Kirill has announced in Moscow that some 400 Orthodox Christian chaplains would be sent to the Russian Army this year, RFE/RL's Tatar-Bashkir Service reports.

The chaplains will be young clergymen with military experience and/or young soldiers and officers who have a religious education.

Patriarch Kirill also said at an eparchy session on February 2 that in 2010 all the commanders of army's units at the brigade and division level will have aides for religious issues.

Last year, President Dmitry Medvedev publicly supported the idea of reinstating religious leaders in the Russian Army but added that leaders of all Russia's traditional religions should be in the army, and not just Orthodox Christian priests.

The Defense Ministry reports that 60 percent of Russian Army soldiers say they believe in God. Almost 80 percent of those believers are Orthodox Christians, 13 percent are Muslims, 3 percent are Buddhists, and 1 percent are Jews. The country's constitution states that the Russian Federation is a secular country where religion is separate from the state.

Muslims raided, more Jehovah's Witness literature banned

By Geraldine Fagan

Forum 18 (28.01.2010) / HRWF (01.02.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Email: info@hrwf.net - Two readers of the late Turkish Islamic theologian Said Nursi could face religious extremism charges following mid-December 2009 raids in the North Caucasus republic of Dagestan, Forum 18 News Service has learnt. Local law-enforcement personnel

"say there will definitely be a court case", Ziyautdin Dapayev, one of those under criminal investigation, told Forum 18 from the Dagestani capital Makhachkala on 23 January. In a separate religious extremism case in the Siberian republic of Altai, a ban on 27 items of Jehovah's Witness literature was upheld on 27 January.

The Dagestan raids came as the state moves against even a top Muslim leader for inviting a prominent Turkish Nursi follower to a September 2009 Moscow conference. Issued an extremism warning by the city's public prosecutors in mid-January 2010, Ravil Gainutdin chairs the Russia-wide Council of Muftis and the Muslim Board of European Russia. He joined President Dmitry Medvedev on the presidium of a meeting of the presidential Committee for Relations with Religious Associations in March 2009.

Defenders of state action against followers of Nursi's approach to Islam, such as Roman Silantsev, a vice-chair of the Justice Ministry's recently formed Expert Council for Conducting State Religious-Studies Expert Analysis, routinely claim that they form an organisation banned for extremism in Turkey, "Nurdzhular". Official Turkish government documents recently viewed by Forum 18, however, state categorically that Nursi's works are not harmful in any way whatsoever and are freely available in Turkey.

The Expert Council has been the focus of widespread protests by Russian religious communities and human rights defenders.

Armed police raid in Dagestan

According to Nursi reader Ziyautdin Dapayev, "a whole busload" of armed and masked rapid reaction police led by a senior investigator with the Dagestani FSB security service, Abdulla Abdullayev, broke up a gathering of some 30 Nursi readers at his Makhachkala home at 8pm on 11 December. Having burst in in dirty shoes, the law-enforcement personnel struck residents and guests while forcibly removing them barefoot into the cold communal stairway. They then confiscated some 1,200 of Dapayev's books and brochures, including many in Arabic, English and Turkish. Dapayev stressed to Forum 18 that the literature at his home was not extremist and did not include the Russian translations of Nursi's "Risale-i Nur" collection, controversially banned by a Moscow court in May 2007.

Dapayev, his flatmate Ruslan Bulatov and their guests were subsequently detained for over eight hours at Makhachkala FSB headquarters. There they were told to make statements admitting membership of Nurdzhular, banned by Russia's Supreme Court in April 2008. They insist that they do not know or belong to any such organisation, however: "We just read Nursi's books to strengthen our faith (..) People who read 'Risale-i Nur' [Messages of Light] are not some kind of organisation, trend, still less a political party, but ordinary Muslims (..) The only thing linking his readers is the same love and brotherhood as between all believers."

According to Dapayev, the group was threatened with extended detention unless they confessed; students also with expulsion from college and parents with harm to their children. Criminal cases were then opened against Dapayev and Bulatov under Article 282.2, Part 2 of the Criminal Code (participation in a banned religious extremist organisation), carrying a maximum two-year prison sentence.

Simultaneous raids were conducted at the Makhachkala homes of Gaidar Gadzhiyev, Shakhveled Muradaliyev, Saifudin Sereda and Timur Khaibulayev, as well as on Nursi readers in the Dagestani towns of Izberbash and Derbent, Dapayev told Forum 18.

"Freedom of religion and conscience is the cornerstone."

"Freedom of religion and conscience is the cornerstone of our civilised society and their defence should be a part of any lawful state action," Dapayev maintained to Forum 18. Instead, while "ordinary citizens exercising our basic constitutional rights," Nursi readers are becoming "victims to the incompetence of some employees of the law enforcement agencies," he maintains.

He insists that Nursi, likened to Mahatma Gandhi and Leo Tolstoy, supported "peaceful coexistence of all peoples" and that his readers can bring only benefit to society: "They say, 'but maybe you will commit some kind of crime, how do we know?' In that case, one can presume that, carrying weapons, the rapid reaction police, FSB and other law-enforcement agencies might open fire against innocent people. If that is probable, then their weaponry should be confiscated and a criminal case opened against each of them. Why does the 'law of probability' apply only to ordinary Muslims?"

Official defence of raids

Contacted repeatedly on 28 January, a spokesperson at the press service of Dagestan FSB said there was no one present who could answer Forum 18's questions. In a comment published by the independent Dagestani newspaper Chernovik on 25 December, the republic's FSB did confirm simultaneous "investigatory actions" in several towns on 11 December, involving the detention of some 40 people and discovery of a large quantity of banned literature. They were part of a criminal case on extremism opened on 16 November 2009, the FSB explained, on the basis of the May 2007 and April 2008 court bans on "Risale-i Nur" and Nurdzhular.

After the raids, a 3,000-word 24 December report by RIA Novosti Dagestan warned that "conspiratorial cells" of Nursi readers – equated with Nurdzhular – meet in "conspiratorial flats" in the republic. Nursi followers aim to unite all Turkic peoples around Turkey in a "Turkic empire", the news agency claims – and are thus supported by the intelligence agencies of Turkey and the USA, "whose aims are to weaken and then completely destroy Russia". In what is now a routine argument of Nursi critics in Russia, however, the report also argues that the theologian's works "are banned in most countries of the world" - including Turkey, where the "Nurdzhular sect" is also allegedly banned "and attempts to spread it are very strictly punished."

Turkish defence of Nursi's works

Official Turkish state documents recently viewed by Forum 18 undermine this claim. Responding to similar 1950s allegations that Nursi – then living - and his followers were "violating state security using religious spirituality and organisation of a society called Nurdzhular", Afyon City Court in western Turkey ruled on 23 June 1956 that books confiscated from them "do not pose a threat to the content of the laws or political and administrative security of the country" and should be returned.

A similar 17 October 1960 ruling specifically notes that the books of the "Risale-i Nur" collection "were published with state permission and are permitted to be freely bought and sold". This ruling also notes that "not a scrap of evidence was found to suggest that the defendants were gathering in pursuit of anything other than religious aims, or organised any form of society by the name of Nurdzhular (..) it was [therefore] ascertained that the only thing linking these people labelled Nurdzhular is spiritual unity as a result of reading the same books."

A 30 March 2007 statement signed by Mehmet Görmez, vice-chair of Turkey's governmental Presidency of Religious Affairs (Diyanet Isleri Baskanligi) likewise finds that the 14 books of "Risale-i Nur" "contain no statements whatsoever aimed at inciting religious hatred, belittling individual people or groups of people adhering to different religious views or giving rise to hostile feelings in relation to them, belittling national feelings and traditions, encouraging the exclusivity of separate people by exploiting their religious and national views, defending extremism and radical actions or calling for recognition of the exclusivity of individual groups on the basis of political and ethnic differences." He therefore concludes that the works "do not pose any harm whatsoever from a religious and social point of view".

Extremism warning to senior mufti

Nevertheless, on 18 January Aleksei Grigoryev, Moscow's assistant public prosecutor, issued an extremism warning to top mufti Ravil Gainutdin due to the invitation of prominent Nursi follower Mustafa Sungur to a Moscow conference on "Russia and the Islamic World: Partnership in the Name of Stability" held on 24 September 2009, Interfax reported. Published on the news agency's website, the text of the warning alleges that Sungur belongs to Nurdzhular, whose followers aim "to spread ideas of fundamentalist Islam with elements of intolerance towards non-believers" and attract "people with unsuccessful personal lives and minors using methods of suggestion harmful to citizens' health and brutal psychological oppression".

While acknowledging the presence of the text of the warning on the internet, a spokesperson at Mufti Ravil Gainutdin's office told Forum 18 on 28 January that they had not received any official document and so could not comment. Also on 28 January, the press service of Moscow Public Prosecutor's Office confirmed to Forum 18 that it had issued an extremism warning to Gainutdin. In a 22 January statement to the Muslim affairs website Islam.ru, Damir Gizatullin, his assistant at the Muslim Board of European Russia, admitted that Sungur's invitation had been a "mistake by the conference's organising committee", which, he stressed, had included representatives of organisations other than the Council of Muftis. A 22 January commentary on Islam.ru pointed out, however, that if Russia regards Sungur as persona non grata, it was the responsibility of the Foreign Ministry not to issue him a visa.

Translations of Nursi's works banned in Russia

Added to the Federal List of Extremist Materials after being outlawed by Moscow's Koptevo District Court on 21 May 2007, the Russian translations of "Risale-i Nur" are now banned throughout Russia. Under the Extremism Law, mass distribution, preparation or storage with the aim of mass distribution of the titles could result in a four-year prison term.

Even before the 2007 verdict, Russia's Ombudsman for Human Rights denounced the trial: "No form of opposition to citizens due to their choice of world view (religious or non-religious) is contained in the books and brochures, still less calls for religious hatred and intolerance," Vladimir Lukin declared. "It is very important that we do not allow interference in the convictions and beliefs of millions of citizens on the poorly grounded, unproven pretext of fighting against extremism, as this really could provoke wide-scale violations of their right to freedom of belief." At the time, Ravil Gainutdin described the ban as "a crude violation of freedom of conscience in our country".

Koptevo District Court met in closed session and its seven-page ruling did not cite any evidence for the psychologists' and linguists' conclusions on which the ban rests, such as

that Nursi's work "propagandises hatred between Muslims and non-believers". Among the strongest evidence against "Risale-i Nur" found by psychologists and psychiatrists in their 2006 analysis for a similar case opened in Tatarstan was that Nursi's reference to a prophecy about Jesus' Second Coming as the fulfilment of sharia law "discredits the religious value of Christianity as a religion" and that his reference to "the sword of strong faith" was "a concept of opposition and war which could lead to defensive behaviour".

Intermittent state action against Nursi readers occurred in Tatarstan and elsewhere in Russia both before and after the bans on "Risale-i Nur" and Nurdzhular. Latterly, prominent officials in Tatarstan have expressed doubt about such action to Forum 18, especially after some 50 Turkish teachers in the republic were refused visa extensions to work in secular Tatar-Turkish lycees with a high reputation among the local government elite.

Jehovah's Witnesses fail to overturn extremism ruling

Meanwhile, the Supreme Court of Altai Republic in southern Siberia on 27 January upheld an earlier ruling by the city court in the capital, Gorno-Altai, outlawing 18 items of Jehovah's Witness literature as extremist. This means that the ban now enters legal force.

While no further possibility for a direct appeal exists, the Jehovah's Witnesses are currently considering lodging a supervisory complaint with the Supreme Court in Moscow, their spokesperson Grigory Martynov told Forum 18 on 28 January. Three of the titles outlawed were among the 34 already banned by an 11 September 2009 decision of Rostov-on-Don Regional Court, upheld by Russia's Supreme Court on 8 December.

While those titles have yet to be added to the Federal List of Extremist Materials, Jehovah's Witnesses have received detentions and official warnings in various regions in the wake of the Supreme Court ruling.

Another court ruling signals deteriorating freedoms

JW Information Office (27.01.2010) / HRWF (05.02.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Email: info@hrwf.net - A disconcerting trend continued in Russia on Wednesday when the Supreme Court of the Altay Republic upheld the ruling of the lower city court to pronounce 18 religious publications of Jehovah's Witnesses extremist. This mirrors the ruling of a similar case last month in the Russian Federation Supreme Court in Moscow. These developments have caught the attention of human rights activists and others, leaving many international observers concerned about where this will end.

Horst Henschel is a member of the board of directors of Wachturm Bibel- und Traktat-Gesellschaft, the corporation that prints the Christian publications in question. Henschel was himself persecuted in Eastern Germany for his faith and so voiced his concern about this decision: "To label our publications as 'extremist' does not make sense to us, especially since our literature promotes strong family values, respect for authority and a love of neighbor. What country would not want citizens who reflect these principles? We know that millions will be voicing their concern that this decision reflects a Russia that is intensifying its restriction of freedom of thought and peaceful freedom of expression."

Many Russian and foreign visitors were already puzzled by the conclusions of the experts who influenced the case, particularly after reviewing the literature for themselves online. Earlier this month, a number of international human rights organizations made an open plea

to the president of the Russian Federation, in which they expressed their concerns over the violations of the rights of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia. The statement read in part: "The acknowledgement of materials as being extremist is based on unscrupulous 'made-to-order' appraisals, conducted by prosecution-picked experts. . . . The acknowledgement of these experts transforms tens of thousands of the faithful into criminals. . . . Criminal prosecution for one's faith may very well become a reality any day now."

Jehovah's Witnesses have 160,000 members in Russia, with nearly 300,000 who attend their largest annual event.

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Rights group: Russian religious freedom in danger

Nataliya Vasilyeva

AP (25.01.2010) / HRWF (28.01.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Email: info@hrwf.net - Religious freedoms are being rapidly curtailed throughout Russia as the Orthodox Church seeks to boost its dominance, human rights activists warned Monday.

In its annual report on religions freedoms, the independent Moscow-based Liberty of Conscience Institute expressed concern that growing state support for the Russian Orthodox Church is coming at the expense of minority denominations.

President Dmitry Medvedev's initiative to permanently assign Orthodox priests to army units and introduce religious education classes at state schools could prove detrimental to the idea of Russia as a secular state, the report said.

Those moves breach the constitution and are aimed at "fostering loyalty to the regime," Sergei Mozgovoi, co-chair of the institute's board, told reporters.

Attaching chaplains to army units in particular could incite abuse toward non-Christian conscripts, he said.

The Russian Orthodox Church withered under eight decades of Soviet rule, but has enjoyed a resurgence over the past two decades. The church has more than 100 million followers in Russia and millions more elsewhere. Polls show only about 5 percent of Russians are strict followers, however.

Government and religion are officially separated under Russia's post-Soviet constitution, but the Liberty of Conscience Institute says ties between state and church have become "symbiotic."

In a move criticized by the report's authors, the government is giving vigorous backing to a law that could see the church reclaim valuable property confiscated by Soviet authorities.

Sergei Buryanov, who jointly chairs the institute, accused Russian authorities of using legislation designed to fight extremism to stifle dissent.

Russia is witnessing "a large-scale and systematic persecution" of religious minorities that mainly targets Muslims, he said.

Recent moves against the Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia has also alarmed religious freedoms activists.

Russia's highest court last month upheld a ruling halting the activities of a regional branch of Jehovah's Witnesses and banning dozens of its publications. That followed a 2004 ruling by the Moscow City Court prohibiting a branch in the Russian capital from engaging in religious activity.

The institute said the crackdown on religious freedoms has become so fierce that there may soon be no religious minorities in Russia.

The Russian government confirms condemnation of Jehovah's Witnesses

The Ministry of Justice confirmed Supreme Court decisions. Trials pending in several Russian cities to outlaw faithful branded as "religious extremists". New Year, Molotov cocktails against a Kingdom Hall near Volgograd.

AsiaNews (11.01.2009) / HRWF (20.01.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Email: info@hrwf.net - Among small legal victories, the Kremlin's indifference and attacks on their places of worship, the struggle of the Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia to see the respect of their human rights and religious freedom continues. There is a campaign of persecution, of physical and judicial attacks on the community in different areas of the Russian Federation. The latest episode is the Ministry of Justice response to a letter sent in November by VM Kalin, chairman of the Steering Committee of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia, to President Dmitry Medvedev. The letter denounced "arbitrary" trials masked by accusations of "religious extremism" going on in different courts and a climate of "xenophobic hysteria" against the community, the Russian government responded succinctly: decisions taken by the Supreme Court will be fully implemented. Complete silence and indifference to the issues raised by Kalin. What does this mean?

Attacks and some judicial success

In September the Supreme Court outlawed the community of Jehovah's Witnesses in the city of Taganrog, Neklinov and Matveeva -Kurgan. Judges ruled the ban on their activities and the dissolution of groups. The Supreme Court has confirmed the conviction handed down by the Provincial Court of Rostov. Other trials are also pending that could lead to the dismantling of communities in different parts of the country: in Salsk (province of Rostov), Gorno-Altai (Altai Republic), Krasnodar (Krasnodar province), Vladikavkaz (Republic of North Ossetia-Alania), Lomonosov (province Arkhangelsk) and Yekaterinburg (Sverdlovsk province). To defend themselves against accusations and avert the dissolution of the organization's community leaders in Russia, intend to appeal to European Court for Human Rights, they believe, in fact, that the charges raised against them contradict the principles upon which Russia's cooperation with countries like the United States and Germany in fighting religious extremism is based.

But it is not only defeats. In December, the Jehovah's Witnesses won a trial that saw them charged with "extremist activities and literature" in Orks (province of Orenburg) and Samara. In both cases the judges found no violation of federal law in the work of the community, as advocated instead by the prosecutors.

More attacks

Attacks on Jehovah's Witnesses are not, however, confined to the courtrooms. New Year's Eve, a few minutes after midnight, two Molotov cocktails were thrown against the Kingdom Hall (the place of worship in the community) of Volzhsky in the province of Volgograd. The attackers took advantage of the uproar caused by the fireworks to launch their attack; the flames have caused some damage to the building, but rescuers were able to extinguish it before the fire spread.

Probably Russia finds "fault" with the Jehovah's Witnesses in their practices: conscientious objection to military service, refusing to take up arms, refusing blood transfusions and the demand of total dedication of members to the life of the community.

<http://www.asianews.it/news-en/The-Russian-government-confirms-condemnation-of-Jehovah's-Witnesses-17312.html>

Supreme Court ban on Jehovah's Witnesses begins to bite

By Geraldine Fagan

Forum 18 (15.01.2010) / HRWF (19.01.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Email: info@hrwf.net - Even though 34 Jehovah's Witness publications described as extremist have not yet been added to the Federal List of Extremist Materials, public prosecutors in disparate Russian regions have already begun issuing extremism warnings to Jehovah's Witness communities, Forum 18 News Service has learnt. In what is believed to be the first such instance in post-Soviet Russia of extended detention in connection with preaching, two Jehovah's Witnesses informally accused of distributing extremist literature in Bryansk Region were released on appeal yesterday evening (14 January), six days into a ten-day sentence for "petty hooliganism". Pointing to the general shutdown during Russia's lengthy recent holiday period, Grigory Martynov of the Jehovah's Witnesses told Forum 18 on 13 January that it is too early for a comprehensive assessment of the situation, however: "We are waiting to see what the New Year will bring."

The 34 Jehovah's Witness titles – published in Germany and the USA and widely distributed internationally - were described as extremist in a decision of Russia's Supreme Court on 8 December. Under the Extremism Law, mass distribution, preparation or storage with the aim of mass distribution of the titles could now result in a four-year prison term. The Supreme Court also upheld, as part of the ruling, the liquidation of the Taganrog Jehovah's Witness congregation as extremist. Shortly after the decision, a Court secretary insisted to Forum 18 that Jehovah's Witnesses expound extremist views in Russia. Asked if they had killed anyone, for example, she replied: "To a certain extent, yes".

Protests and official responses

Protesting against the mounting pressure on his community, Vasily Kalin, a prisoner of conscience in 1983 and current head of the Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia, had appealed to President Dmitry Medvedev as guarantor of Russia's 1993 Constitution to defend their rights and freedoms on 11 November: "The basic rights which the Jehovah's Witnesses are fighting for today are critical for the preservation of democratic freedoms in Russia."

The Presidential Administration's 17 November response, however, as seen by Forum 18, stated only that this appeal had been referred to the Justice Ministry. It claimed this was because resolution of the questions it raised lay outside the competency of the President (Article 8, Part 3 of the 2006 Law on the Procedure for Responding to Communications from Russian Citizens). "We have the impression that the Presidential Administration is trying to distance itself from this issue," Grigory Martynov of the Jehovah's Witnesses remarked to Forum 18 on 12 January.

The office of Russia's Human Rights Ombudsman has no legal mandate to intervene in the Jehovah's Witnesses' situation, its top official dealing with religious issues, Mikhail Odintsov, pointed out to Forum 18 on 15 January: "If there is a court decision, it has to be implemented." If a top-level court rules in contravention of human rights, only a political decision by the President as constitutional guarantor can rectify the situation, he also confirmed: "Everyone else will take refuge behind court decisions."

Closely familiar with the Jehovah's Witnesses' plight, Odintsov suggested to Forum 18 – in what he stressed was his personal view – that there was a realistic chance they could still appeal successfully to President Medvedev if they formulated their complaints in purely legal terms – "competently, precisely and clearly (..) not 'our head hurts'." Another avenue, he suggested, would be to appeal to the Constitutional Court, since "the rights of Smith, Jones and Brown – concrete citizens – are being violated."

Characterising the overall situation as "threatening", Odintsov – the author of an archival reader on Soviet policy towards Jehovah's Witnesses – also maintained that "reverse Sovietisation" was taking place. "We are returning to the ideological roots of state dislike of certain religious organisations," he remarked to Forum 18. "These people [Jehovah's Witnesses] have no defence. What defence do they have when a court is negatively predisposed towards them, pro-Orthodox, believes that one religion should be protected from another?"

If the Presidential Administration is so far silent, the Justice Ministry's 11 December response to Kalin – seen by Forum 18 – unequivocally supports state action against the Jehovah's Witnesses. Since Rostov-on-Don Regional Court's 11 September ruling was upheld by the Supreme Court on 8 December, Sergei Milushkin of the Ministry explains, the 34 Jehovah's Witness publications it declared extremist are liable to confiscation and inclusion on the Federal List of Extremist Materials, while the local Jehovah's Witness organisation in Taganrog is banned and its property to be transferred to the state. Having thus entered force, stresses Milushkin, the Rostov-on-Don ruling is "binding for all state authorities, social organisations, authorised persons, citizens and organisations without exception, and is subject to strict application across the territory of the Russian Federation."

The 34 banned Jehovah's Witness publications have to date (15 January) yet to be entered on the Federal List. Once added, their distribution will be formally banned throughout Russia under the 2002 Extremism Law (Article 13). Public distribution of religious literature is an integral part of Jehovah's Witness practice.

According to Martynov of the Jehovah's Witnesses, the Taganrog community is currently still using its property. Seven Russian regions have taken action against Jehovah's Witnesses since the Supreme Court ruling, however.

First Russian post-Soviet detentions for sharing beliefs

In what Jehovah's Witnesses think is the first case in post-Soviet Russia of extended detention of their members in connection with preaching, Mikhail Tomayev and Arif Ibragimov were sentenced to ten days' administrative arrest by a magistrate in Pochep (Bryansk Region) on 9 January. While the pair claim they were initially also accused of distributing extremist literature, the formal charges – also seen by Forum 18 – state that they "violated public order, used foul language in a public place, harassed citizens", or "petty hooliganism" under the Administrative Violations Code (Article 20.1, Part 1).

Tomayev protested that he and Ibragimov were in fact "going from door to door sharing our knowledge of the Bible with people who were interested" when detained on 8 January, and that he does not use foul language "not only in public, but ever, in accordance with my conscience as instructed by the Bible." In his complaint to Pochep District Court, Tomayev also describes how, instead of heeding his plea that "the right to share one's religious convictions is a constitutional right and therefore I had not violated the law," one police officer swore at him and "expressed his dislike of me as a believer in God".

Six days into their detention at Pochep District Police Department, Pochep District Court granted the pair's appeal and they were released at approximately 5pm on the evening of 14 January, according to their lawyer Sergei Palagin. The district court struck down the magistrate's charges primarily because "petty hooliganism" must by definition take place in public, but there were no witnesses, Palagin explained to Forum 18 on 15 January. Police initially claimed Tomayev and Ibragimov were distributing extremist literature but did not pursue this accusation, Palagin confirmed. Nevertheless, Jehovah's Witness magazines, tracts and books confiscated from the pair – he did not know the titles – have not yet been released, the lawyer told Forum 18.

A spokesperson at Pochep District Police Department refused to comment to Forum 18 by telephone on 15 January.

Extremism warnings given to local communities

In Rostov-on-Don Region, Volgodonsk Public Prosecutor's Office issued an extremism warning to its local Jehovah's Witness organisation on 28 December. This pointed out that several US-published titles distributed by the community – "What Does the Bible Really Teach?", "Knowledge That Leads to Everlasting Life", "Worship the One True God", "My Book of Bible Stories" and "Pay Attention to Daniel's Prophecy!" – were recognised as extremist by the 11 September Rostov-on-Don Regional Court ruling, now in force. The titles have been added to the Federal List of Extremist Materials, the warning also claims.

Also on 28 December, the website of Arkhangelsk Regional Public Prosecutor's Office announced that its office in Arkhangelsk's Lomonosov District had issued an extremism warning to that city's central Jehovah's Witness community after conducting a check-up in response to appeals from the regional branch of Russia's Writers' Union and the Anti-Sectarian Information Centre, a social organisation. The check-up found that the Jehovah's Witnesses had violated the 2002 Extremism Law by distributing materials "aimed at inciting hatred towards the Christian and other religions". The tracts "Awake!" and "Watchtower" are mentioned, as is the brochure "Jehovah's Witnesses. Who Are They? What Do They

Believe?", a title among those banned by Rostov-on-Don Regional Court. Investigators are considering whether to open a criminal case, according to the website.

On 23 December the website of Adygeya Republic Public Prosecutor's Office announced that its local officials had issued 11 extremism warnings to local Jehovah's Witnesses following a check-up on their community in the town of Adygeisk which uncovered literature declared extremist by the Rostov-on-Don ruling.

An 18 December document issued by the public prosecutor's office in the town of Dalnerechensk (Primorye Region) warns local Jehovah's Witnesses about the inadmissibility of violating the Extremism Law by failing to possess a copy of the Federal List of Extremist Materials, even though this is not demanded by the Law.

Literature censorship

A letter from a public prosecutor received by local police in the town of Glazov (Udmurtia) on 11 December, whose precise department of origin is obscured, notes the 8 December Supreme Court decision and orders that local Jehovah's Witnesses be checked for extremist literature.

At Vyborg near the Russian-Finnish border, however, customs officers are now admitting all Jehovah's Witness literature except for one title declared extremist by the Rostov-on-Don ruling, the book "Come Be My Follower", according to Martynov of the Jehovah's Witnesses. The customs officers - including from the Department Against Especially Dangerous Types of Contraband - had refused to admit Jehovah's Witness literature altogether in October.

Meanwhile, Altai Republic Supreme Court is due to rule in a separate extremism case on Jehovah's Witness literature on 27 January. The hearing, postponed from 23 December, will consider an appeal against a 1 October 2009 ruling by the city court in Gorno-Altai, the republic's capital, that 18 Jehovah's Witness publications are extremist. Three of the titles coincide with those in the Rostov-on-Don ruling.

Future developments?

Among the seven local cases currently seeking to ban Jehovah's Witness literature as extremist, those in Rostov-on-Don and Gorno-Altai have progressed furthest. The deportations of four North American lawyers since March 2009 have damaged their already pressed defence in the trials.

The Jehovah's Witnesses think the law enforcement agencies are pursuing a total ban of their organisation. In February 2009, an unprecedented nationwide sweep on Jehovah's Witness communities - resulting in at least 500 check-ups - was ordered by the General Public Prosecutor's Office. The Office has insisted to Forum 18 that the check-ups were lawful and uncovered legal violations.

The 473 titles on the Federal List of Extremist Materials as of 15 January typically suggest extreme nationalist or anti-Semitic content. Most entries relating to religious material - the inclusion of some of which is also disputed - are Islamic.

Samara prosecutor rejects accusation against Jehovah's Witnesses

Portal-credo.ru (04.01.2010) / HRWF (12.01.2010) - Website: www.hrwf.net - Email: info@hrwf.net - Action on a suit by the prosecutor's office of Samara province for the liquidation of the Jehovah's Witnesses religious organization in the city of Samara was terminated on 30 December 2009 because of the prosecutor's rejection of the suit's demands, the official site of the Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia reports. In March 2009 the prosecutor of Samara province filed in court suits for the liquidation of two local Jehovah's Witnesses religious organizations in Toliatti and Samara. The decision with regard to the Jehovah's Witnesses congregation in Toliatti was rendered 29 May 2009: the Samara provincial court did not find violations of the law in its activity and rejected the prosecutor's suit, and the Supreme Court of the Russian federation let the decision stand.

Earlier, on 11 September 2009, a Rostov provincial court found 34 titles of Jehovah's Witnesses' literature extremist and liquidated their congregation in Taganrog, and on 8 December 2009 the Supreme Court of the Russian federation let the decision stand.

Orsk city court closes case against chairman of local Jehovah's Witnesses organization

Portal-credo.ru (30.12.2009) / HRWF (12.01.2010) - Website: www.hrwf.net - Email: info@hrwf.net - The press service of the Administrative Center of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia reports the decision to close the administrative case with respect to the chairman of the local religious organization of Jehovah's Witnesses, Konstantin Mikhailovich Kvartiuk, on the basis of the absence of the essence of administrative violations of law in his activities, issued 22 December by Justice of the Peace V.V. Orlov of the city of Orsk, Orenburg province.

In the opinion of the prosecutor of the city of Orsk, the chairman of the Jehovah's Witnesses local religious organization violated the federal law "On meetings, protests, demonstrations, parades, and pickets," since he had not informed the authorities of the holding of a religious congress of the Jehovah's Witnesses on 24 and 25 October 2009 in rented premises. Kvartiuk and his representative in court explained that the event in question was a form of divine worship by Jehovah's Witnesses. According to the federal law "On freedom of conscience and religious organizations" divine worship does not require any permission and approval from secular authorities nor the notification of authorities in accordance with the procedure provided for by the law "On meetings, protests, demonstrations, parades, and pickets." The court agreed with the conclusions of the Jehovah's Witnesses' chairman and closed the case.

Similar decisions have been made several times by the Supreme Court of the Russian federation, indicating that for conducting religious meetings by Jehovah's Witnesses in sites provided to them, no kinds of permissions or consents by government agencies are required. The plenipotentiary for human rights in the Russian federation, V.P. Lukin, stated in a special report, "On implementation of the constitutional right to peaceful assembly on the territory of the Russian federation," of 26 June 2007: "Action of the given federal law [i.e. "On meetings, protests, demonstrations, parades, and pickets"—ed.] does not extend to religious rites and ceremonies."

New Year's night arson of Jehovah's Witnesses house of worship

Portal-credo.ru (04.01.2010) / HRWF (12.01.2010) - Website: www.hrwf.net - Email: info@hrwf.net - Two bottles with a flammable mixture were thrown through the window of the Kingdom Hall (house of worship) of the Jehovah's Witnesses in the city of Volzhsky, Volgograd province, on the night of 1 January 2010 at five minutes after midnight, the press service of the Administrative Center of the Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia reports. Unknown persons, taking advantage of the noise made by exploding fireworks, threw these bottles, one of which struck the frame and burst into flame. Watchmen located within the premises summoned the fire department, although before its arrival they were able to extinguish the flame with fire extinguishers. The criminals noticed the movement within the building and ran off, leaving another three prepared bottles on the snow.

The firefighters called the police. At approximately 3:00 a.m. the assistant chief of the Department of Internal Affairs of Volgograd province arrived at the site and he ordered an investigation of the incident. It has become known that on the same night, somewhat earlier, arson of a house of worship of one of the protestant churches also was committed in Volzhsky.

Will more religious literature be banned in Russia?

A hearing is set for January 27, 2010, in the Supreme Court of the Altay Republic

JW Official Media Website (07.01.2010) / HRWF (12.01.2010) - Website: www.hrwf.net - Email: info@hrwf.net - The basis for this appeal came on October 1, 2009, when the city court of Gorno-Altaysk issued a decision that labels 18 religious publications of Jehovah's Witnesses extremist. Copyrights for these publications belong to Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania, and Wachtturm Bibel- und Traktat-Gesellschaft in Germany is the publisher. The decision that was reached in the city court in Gorno-Altaysk directly affects the rights and responsibilities of these foreign legal entities. They were not allowed to present necessary proof and to participate in the examination of evidence, thereby not being allowed to contribute to a full and comprehensive review of case materials; they filed a complaint to the Supreme Court of the republic.

As of January 2010, publications of the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania are produced in 537 languages and distributed in 236 lands. The combined monthly circulation of The Watchtower and Awake! exceeds 77 million copies each month, of which only 3 million are distributed in Russia.

Yaroslav Sivulskiy, spokesman for Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia, comments: "These publications contain articles that teach us respect, mercy and love for fellowman. You can read them and see for yourself. Using an educational approach to faith, Jehovah's Witnesses strive to counteract trends toward prejudice and the real extremism that is dangerous, even deadly. Jehovah's Witnesses are an open, politically neutral religious association known worldwide, including all over Russia. For decades, Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia have been extending peace and kindness toward people of all nationalities who may have different viewpoints. Although some may not like the fact that Jehovah's Witnesses share their faith in God with others, nevertheless the teachings and activities of the Witnesses have nothing to do with 'extremism.'"

The appeal hearing in the Judicial Chamber for Civil Cases of the Supreme Court of the Altay Republic is set for January 27, 2010, at 9:00 in the morning. The appeal will be heard at the address Tsentralniy per., 3, in the city of Gorno-Altaysk.

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Justice ministry replies to Baptists' concerns regarding evangelism

When does the State have the right to prohibit evangelistic activity of Russian citizens?

Portal-credo.ru (05.01.2010) / HRWF (11.01.2010) - Website: www.hrwf.net - Email: info@hrwf.net - On 14 December 2009, the Russian Ministry of Justice answered the Evangelical Christians-Baptists' concerns regarding the prohibition of evangelistic activities as follows:

"Your appeals to the president of the Russian federation, D.A. Medvedev, the chairman of the government of the Russian federation, V.V. Putin, and Russian Minister of Justice A.V. Konovalov regarding the issue of the draft of a federal law "On introducing amendments into the federal law 'On freedom of conscience and religious associations' and the Code of the Russian Federation regarding Administrative Violations of Law" (hereafter, "draft law") have been reviewed by the Department for Affairs of Noncommercial Organizations of the Ministry of Justice of the Russian federation.

As to the substance of the conclusions contained in your appeal, we think it necessary to explain that on the whole the draft law derives from the constitutional principle of the permissibility of restriction on human rights and freedoms of citizens only by means of federal laws whose goals are the protection of the bases of the constitutional structure, morality, health, rights, and legal interests of other persons, and guaranteeing the defense of the country and the security of the state (part 3, article 55 of the constitution of the Russian federation).

In conformity with the resolution of the Constitutional Court of the Russian federation of 23 November 1999, No. 16-P, on the matter of determining the constitutionality of paragraphs three and four of point 3 of article 27 of the federal law of 26 September 1997, "On freedom of conscience and religious associations" in connection with appeals of the religious society of Jehovah's Witnesses in the city of Yaroslavl and the religious association "Christian Church of Celebration," the state has the right to prohibit evangelistic activity (including the problem of proselytism) if it is incompatible with respect for the freedom of thought, conscience, and religion of other persons and for constitutional rights and freedoms, and is specifically accompanied by the offer of material or social benefits with the goal of recruiting new members into a church, and illegal influencing of people who are in need or in poverty, psychological pressure, or threat of the use of violence.

In addition, in accordance with the decision of the European Court on Human Rights of 24 November 1998 in the case of "Larissis and others v. Greece," concerning the practice of performing evangelistic activity, article 9 of the Convention on Protection of Human Rights and Basic Freedoms "does not protect all action motivated or inspired by religion conviction. It does not protect impermissible phenomena of proselytism such as offering material or social benefits or exerting impermissible pressure with the goal of drawing new members into a church."

The provisions of the draft law do not extend to activity of physical persons for the dissemination of their own religious convictions. They are directed to the regulation of the procedure for conducting a special kind of activity—evangelistic activity—only in the name of religious associations (religious organizations, registered in the capacity of a legal entity, and religious groups, who have informed the territorial agency of justice of their creation and beginning of activity).

We call to your attention that restrictions proposed in the draft law on recruitment into religious associations and teaching of religion to minors pertain only to cases where such recruitment occurs despite the wishes of the children and without the consent of their parents. These provisions fully agree with provisions of international law. In particular, they agree with article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 10 December 1948 that parents have the right of priority in the choice of the form of education for their own children; in accordance with article 5 of the Declaration on Liquidation of all Forms of Intolerance and Discrimination on the Basis of Religion or Convictions of 25 November 1981, every child has the right of access to education in the area of religion or convictions in accordance with the wishes of his parents or in appropriate cases legal guardians and is not compelled to education in the area of religion or convictions despite the wishes of parents or legal guardians, in keeping with the guiding principle of the interests of the child.

On the question of the exercise by foreign citizens of the right to conduct evangelistic activity it is necessary to note that the proposed amendments do not extend to foreign citizens who have entered and are present on the territory of the Russian federation on legal bases, with a private visa. The draft law is intended to regulate evangelistic activity of foreign citizens who have entered the territory of the Russian federation in accordance with the procedure provided in point 2 of article 20 of the federal law on 26 September 1997, "On freedom of conscience and religious associations," in accordance with which religious organizations have the exclusive right to invite foreign citizens for purposes of professional training, including the preaching and religious activity of the given organizations. The obligation of foreign citizens to observe the goals of entry into the Russian federation is established by the federal law of 25 July 2002, "On the legal condition of foreign citizens in the Russian federation."

It is necessary to note that work on the draft law has still not been completed. Reasonable and constructive comments regarding the draft law will be considered by the Ministry of Justice of the Russian federation.

Zh.A. Dzhakupov,
Acting Director of the Department for Affairs of Noncommercial Organizations

Jehovah's Witnesses get no satisfaction from Russian president

Jehovah's Witnesses receive answer to letter sent to President Medvedev. They were reminded that court's decision remains unchanged.

Portal-credo.ru (05.01.2010) / HRWF (11.01.2010) - Website: www.hrwf.net - Email: info@hrwf.net - An answer from the Presidential Administration of the Russian federation to a letter sent to D.A. Medvedev has been received by the chairman of the Presiding Committee of the Administrative Center of Jehovah's Witness in Russia religious organization, V.M. Kalin, the press service of the Administrative Center of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia reports.

In their letter believers called attention to the fact that "xenophobic hysteria has been whipped up around the Witnesses," and that "today any regional court can, by using the imprecision of the legislation, declare 'extremist' just about any publications," and that "governmental organs have conducted raids and searches in religious buildings and private homes, interrogated and fingerprinted believers, confiscated books, seized batches of religious literature, and interrupted divine worship services" and that "from day to day the situation is getting worse." The letter concludes with a request to "guarantee the constitutional principle of a secular state, protect . . . [believers] from bureaucratic arbitrariness, and provide effective judicial protection."

The Presidential Administration of the Russian federation reported that the letter was submitted for review by the Ministry of Justice of RF, from which an answer arrived dated 11 December 2009, signed by the director of the Department for Affairs of Noncommercial Organizations of the Ministry of Justice of Russia, S.Yu. Milushkin.

The answer got around in silence the problems mentioned in the Jehovah's Witnesses' appeal. Only a brief explanation was given: "We report that by decision of the Supreme Court of the Russian federation of 8 December 2009 the decision of the Rostov provincial court. . . regarding liquidation of the 'Taganrog' Jehovah's Witnesses local religious organization as extremist was left without change." The response concludes with a reminder that judicial decisions that have gone into effect are subject to rigorous fulfillment. (tr. by PDS, posted 5 January 2010).

Jehovah's Witnesses appeal to Russian president

11 November 2009

To: D.A. Medvedev, President of Russian federation

Esteemed Dmitry Anatolievich

PDS (12.11.2009) / HRWF (11.01.2010) - Website: www.hrwf.net - Email: info@hrwf.net - After the release of the significant article "Russia, Forward!" we are moved to call your attention to the threatening situation arising with regard to more than 160,000 Russians who profess the religion of the Jehovah's Witnesses, in which, as in a mirror, were reflected critical problems of contemporary Russia.

The history of our religion in Russia comprises more than 100 years. Of these, for 50 years believers were subjected to cruel persecutions. But even in that sordid time atheist scholars came to two unquestioned conclusions that are clearly formulated in contemporary references for religious studies: Jehovah's Witnesses (1) are Christians whose convictions are based on the Bible, and (2) are law-abiding citizens, since submission "to the higher powers" is an integral part of their religious convictions and practice (Bible, Romans 13.14).

Eighteen years ago we were rehabilitated as victims of political repressions and enjoyed freedom in order that by our example, biblical preaching, and the written word we could help tens and even hundreds of thousands of people to receive hope, to be delivered from slavery to alcohol and drugs, to pull families together, and to protect children from dangers. Some of the people became Jehovah's Witnesses, and some did not. Indeed, we have our own firm religious views, based on the Bible, which we openly profess and which can be distinguished from views of other confessions. However we do not impose our beliefs and we do not violate the law, and we respect the rights of others. We are sure that our position and conduct fully correspond to the representations of civil society that you wish to construct in Russia.

But it is becoming ever more difficult to defend our liberty here. As in soviet times, around the Witnesses there has been fomented a xenophobic hysteria that influential state agencies have been drawn into. The national Russian news media have taken up the "demonization" of believers. In the opinion of rights advocates, scholars, and officials, law enforcement structures and the media have been fulfilling the confessional decree of some influential people aimed at the infringement of freedom of conscience. These people dream of returning the country to those times when adherence to a different faith was considered a crime. Without a moment's hesitation they are prepared to cast Russia into 200th place in the civilized world, since of 236 countries and territories of the world where Jehovah's Witnesses live, their freedom of conscience is restricted in only 25 [sic], which are famous for the crudest violations of human rights. However your article "Russia, Forward!" gives us reason to hope that these people will not have success in contemporary Russia.

Many courts, often despite pressure, have rendered decisions in favor of the Witnesses. The Supreme Court of Russia alone, in recent years, has defended our activity 8 times. Nevertheless, the mechanism of judicial protection still remains of little effect. After suffering defeat in some regions, the enemies of religious freedom find ruling judges in others, since today any regional court can, by exploiting the ambiguity of the legislation, declare practically any publications "extremist." Thus, according to the representation of the prosecutors of Gorno-Altai and Taganrog, in September-October 2009 courts rendered decisions entering more than 50 named liturgical publications of the Jehovah's Witnesses into the federal list of extremist materials, despite the fact that they are freely distributed in 500 languages throughout the world, including all European countries.

Without waiting for these decisions to take legal effect, state agencies have been conducting raids and searches in religious buildings and private homes, they have been arresting, interrogating, and fingerprinting believers, confiscating books, seizing batches of religious literature and interrupting worship services, in violation of international obligations that Russia has undertaken, including the recent decision of the European Court for Human Rights. These people do not worry about Russia's reputation. We have received information that hostile elements, appealing to news media information, have threatened our fellow believers and beaten them. The situation gets worse day by day. They are not interested in peace and concord; they are ready to sow hatred and anger everywhere.

Esteemed Dmitry Anatolievich!

Considering what we have said, we ask you to use your high post as guarantor of the constitution of Russia to protect our rights and liberties. We ask you to guarantee the constitutional principle of the secularity of the state, to protect us from bureaucratic arbitrariness, and to mount an effective judicial defense. We are sure that these requests correspond to the wishes of all honest and law-abiding citizens of Russia. The basic rights, for which Jehovah's Witnesses are fighting today, are vitally necessary for the maintenance in Russia of democratic liberties and the construction of civil society, and for moving forward.

On our part, following biblical commands, we shall strive "to raise prayers, requests, petitions, and thanksgiving for all kinds of people, for kings and all those occupying high positions, so that in the future also we shall lead quiet and peaceful lives in full devotion to God and sobriety" (1 Timothy 2.1,2).

With profound respect,

V.M. Kalin,

Chairman of the Directing Committee of the "Administrative Center of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia" religious organization
