

RUSSIA 2021 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution declares the state is secular and guarantees freedom of religion, equal rights irrespective of religious belief, and the right to worship and profess one's religion. The law states government officials may prohibit the activity of a religious association for violating public order or engaging in "extremist activity." The law allows the government to criminalize a broad spectrum of activities as extremist but does not precisely define extremism. The law identifies Christianity, Islam, Judaism, and Buddhism as the country's four "traditional" religions and recognizes the special role of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC). A constitutional amendment cites the "ideals and faith in God" passed on by the country's ancestors. Religious groups and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) reported authorities continued to investigate, detain, imprison, torture, physically abuse persons, and/or seize their property because of their religious belief or affiliation or membership in groups designated "extremist," "terrorist," or "undesirable," including Jehovah's Witnesses, Mejlis of the Crimean Tatars, Hizb ut-Tahrir, Tablighi Jamaat, followers of Muslim theologian Said Nursi, Church of Scientology, Falun Gong, and multiple evangelical Protestant groups. For example, an NGO reported that in September, while searching houses of Jehovah's Witnesses in Irkutsk, security forces stabbed a man and beat him unconscious and beat another Jehovah's Witness and sodomized him with a glass bottle. According to the NGO, officers also beat the two men's wives while they were in various stages of undress. The human rights NGO Memorial identified 340 persons it said were persecuted for their religious beliefs or affiliation as of November, compared with 228 in all of 2020. Memorial said the actual total was likely three to four times higher. Memorial did not report the number of persecuted persons for all of the year because the Supreme Court ordered the closure of the NGO on December 28. In July, the Court of Kemerovo upheld the designation of the Falun Gong branch in the Khakassia Region as an extremist organization and ordered its dissolution there. During the year, the government declared four Pentecostal and two Scientology groups undesirable, effectively banning them from the country, and banned and dissolved an Orthodox Church unaffiliated with the ROC. The government criminally prosecuted 13 cases of offending the feelings of believers compared with two such cases in 2020, and prosecuted cases against members of smaller religious groups for what it called illegal missionary work. The government continued to grant privileges to the ROC not accorded to other religious groups.

In December, a court sentenced a member of the “Citizens of the USSR” movement to six years in prison for attempting to organize a contract killing of the head of the Jewish Community of Krasnodar. The SOVA Center, a Moscow-based NGO, stated antisemitism was a part of the movement’s ideology. In the first six months of the year, the SOVA Center reported seven incidents of vandalism at religious sites – two Orthodox, two Jewish, two pagan, and one Protestant – as well as other incidents of religiously motivated vandalism. In February, two persons shot an air gun at a grocery store containing a halal market in St. Petersburg. Police opened a criminal case against the two individuals. Authorities reportedly investigated antisemitic social media posts. A survey by the polling firm Levada Center found that 22 percent of respondents professed a negative attitude towards Jews, compared with 34 percent in 2010. Local residents opposed the construction of churches, mosques, and other places of worship in Nizhny Novgorod, Ulyanovsk, Stupino, and Irkutsk.

The U.S. Ambassador and embassy representatives advocated greater religious freedom in the country, highlighting the government’s misuse of the law on extremism to restrict the peaceful activities of religious minorities. The embassy also made extensive use of its social media platforms to disseminate messages advocating religious freedom. Embassy representatives met with representatives of religious groups to discuss the state of religious freedom in the country, though these meetings were fewer than in previous years due to intimidation of religious groups by Russian authorities. In August, the government prohibited the United States from retaining, hiring, or contracting Russian or third-country staff at its diplomatic facilities in the country, further constraining embassy outreach efforts to religious and civil society groups. Department of State officials continued to monitor the situation of U.S. citizens working with religious institutions and organizations in the country to determine whether authorities targeted them for their faith or religious work.

On November 15, 2021, in accordance with the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998, as amended, the Secretary of State designated Russia a Country of Particular Concern for engaging in and tolerating systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations of religious freedom and identified the following sanction that accompanied the designation: the existing ongoing sanctions issued for individuals identified pursuant to section 404(a)(2) of the Russia and Moldova Jackson-Vanik Repeal and Sergei Magnitsky Rule of Law Accountability Act of 2012 and section 11 of the Support for the Sovereignty, Integrity, Democracy, and Economic Stability of Ukraine Act of 2014, as amended by Section 228 of the Countering

America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act, pursuant to section 402(c)(5) of the Act.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 142.3 million (midyear 2021). A poll conducted in 2020 by the independent Levada Center found that 63 percent of the population identified as Orthodox Christian and 7 percent as Muslim, while 26 percent reported having no religious faith. Religious groups each constituting approximately 1 percent or less of the population include Buddhists, Protestants, Roman Catholics, Jews, members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Jehovah's Witnesses, Hindus, Baha'is, members of the International Society of Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), pagans, Tengrists, members of the Church of Scientology, and Falun Gong practitioners. The 2010 census, the most recent for which data is available, estimates the number of Jews at 150,000. The Russian Jewish Congress (RJC) estimates the Jewish population is 172,500. According to Mufti Ravil Gaynutdin, chairman of the Religious Board of Muslims of the Russian Federation, there were 25 million Muslims in 2018, approximately 18 percent of the population. Immigrants and migrant workers from Central Asia, which experts estimate at six to seven million, are mostly Muslim. Most Muslims live in the Volga-Ural Region and the North Caucasus. Moscow, St. Petersburg, and parts of Siberia also have sizable Muslim populations.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution stipulates the state is secular and provides for religious freedom, freedom of conscience, and freedom of religious worship, including the right to "profess, individually or jointly with others, any religion, or to profess no religion." It provides for the right of citizens "to freely choose, possess, and disseminate religious or other beliefs, and to act in conformity with them," and it provides for equality of rights and liberties regardless of attitude toward religion. The constitution bans any limitation of human rights on religious grounds and prohibits actions inciting religious hatred and strife. It states all religious associations are equal and separate from the state. The law acknowledges Christianity, Islam, Judaism, and Buddhism as the country's four "traditional" religions, constituting an inseparable part of the country's historical heritage. The law recognizes the "special role" of Russian Orthodox Christianity in the country's "history and the formation and development of its spirituality and culture."

A 2020 constitutional amendment cites the ancestral history of the country and the “ideals and faith in God” passed on by those ancestors. The language is the only explicit reference to God in the constitution. According to a Constitutional Court ruling, the amendment’s reference to God does not contravene the secular nature of the government or undermine freedom of religion but only emphasizes the significant sociocultural role of religion in the formation and development of the nation.

The law states the government may restrict religious rights only to the degree necessary to protect the constitutional structure and security of the government; the morality, health, rights, and legal interests of persons; or the defense of the country. It is a violation of the law to force another person to disclose his or her opinion of a religion or to force them to participate or not participate in worship, other religious ceremonies, the activities of a religious association, or religious instruction.

The law states those who violate the law on freedom of conscience, religion, and religious associations will be “held liable under criminal, administrative, and other legislation.” The administrative code and the criminal code both punish obstruction of the right to freedom of conscience and belief with imprisonment of up to three years and/or fines of up to 500,000 rubles (\$6,700) or 1,000,000 rubles (\$13,300), depending upon which code governs the offense.

By law, officials may prohibit the activity of a religious association on grounds such as violating public order or engaging in “extremist activity.” The law criminalizes a broad spectrum of activities as extremist, including “assistance to extremism,” but it does not precisely define extremism or require that an activity include an element of violence or hatred to be classified as extremist.

Anti-extremism laws stipulate that speech or actions aimed at “inciting hatred or enmity” based on group affiliation (including religion) are punishable by administrative penalties for first-time offenses if the actions do not contain a criminal offense. These penalties include administrative arrests of up to 15 days or administrative fines of up to 20,000 rubles (\$270) for individuals and up to 500,000 rubles (\$6,700) for legal entities. Individuals are held criminally liable if they commit multiple offenses within a one-year period or for the first offense if they threaten to use violence or use their official position to incite hatred. The criminal penalties include fines up to 600,000 rubles (\$8,000), compulsory labor for up to five years, or imprisonment for up to six years.

Participating in or organizing the activity of a banned religious organization designated as extremist is punishable by a fine of up to 800,000 rubles (\$10,700) or imprisonment for a term of six to 10 years, with deprivation of the right to hold “certain positions” or engage in “certain activities” (not well specified but including a prohibition on running for public office) for up to 10 years and restrictions on freedom for a period of one to two years. These restrictions may include house arrest or constraints on travel within the country. For persons with “official status,” a term which applies to anyone working for the government or state-owned entities as well as to persons in management roles at commercial entities or NGOs, the prescribed prison term is seven to 12 years or a fine of up to 700,000 rubles (\$9,300). First-time offenders who willingly forsake their membership in banned religious organizations are exempt from criminal liability if they committed no other crimes as defined by the law.

Antiterrorism laws authorize law enforcement agencies to regulate evangelism, requiring permits and restricting the locations in which faith-related information may be shared with others. These laws also allow security agencies to access private communications, which requires telecommunications companies to store all telephone conversations, text messages, videos, and picture messages for six months and make this data available to authorities.

The Supreme Court has banned the activities of several religious organizations on the grounds of “extremism” and “terrorism,” including a regional branch of Falun Gong, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Mejlis of the Crimean Tatars, Hizb ut-Tahrir; Nurdzhular (a Russification of the Turkish for “followers of Said Nursi”); Tablighi Jamaat; and the Fayzrakhmani Islamic community. These organizations are on the Federal List of Extremist Organizations and/or the Federal List of Terrorist Organizations. Designations as extremist or terrorist organizations may be appealed in court.

Local laws in several administrative regions, including the republics of Kabardino-Balkaria and Dagestan, ban “extremist Islamic Wahhabism” but do not define the term. Authorities impose administrative or criminal penalties (the former entail a maximum sentence of 15 days in prison, while sentences for the latter can be much longer) for violating these laws, in accordance with federal legislation.

By law, the government may designate an international religious-affiliated organization or foreign religious group “undesirable.” The designation allows the closure of foreign and international organizations on the grounds of “presenting a

threat to the foundation of the constitutional order of the Russian Federation, the defense capability of the country or the security of the state.” The designation may also lead to fines or jail time for organization members. Religious organizations designated undesirable include seven Falun Gong-associated organizations (World Organization to Investigate the Persecution of Falun Gong; Coalition to Investigate the Persecution of Falun Gong in China; Global Mission to Rescue Persecuted Falun Gong Practitioners; Friends of Falun Gong; Doctors Against Forced Organ Harvesting; Dragon Springs Buddhist; and The European Falun Dafa Organization), World Institute of Scientology Enterprises International and the Church of Spiritual Technology (from the United States), the New Generation International Christian Movement and the New Generation Evangelical Christian Church (from Latvia), and the New Generation Spiritual Directorate of the Evangelist Christians and the New Generation International Biblical College (from Ukraine).

The law criminalizes “offending the feelings of religious believers,” including atheists and followers of “non-traditional religions.” Actions “in public demonstrating clear disrespect for society and committed with the intent to insult the feelings of religious believers” are subject to fines of up to 300,000 rubles (\$4,000), compulsory labor for up to one year, or imprisonment for up to one year. If these actions are committed in places of worship, the punishment is a fine of up to 500,000 rubles (\$6,700), compulsory labor for up to three years, or a prison sentence of up to three years.

The law creates three categories of religious associations, with different levels of legal status and privileges: “religious groups,” “local religious organizations” (LROs), and “centralized religious organizations” (CROs). Religious groups or organizations may be subject to legal dissolution or deprivation of legal status by a court decision on grounds including violations of standards set forth in the constitution or protection of public security.

A “religious group” is the most basic unit and does not require registration with the government. When a group first begins its activities, however, it must notify authorities, typically the regional Ministry of Justice (MOJ), of the location of its activity, its rites and ceremonies, and its leader(s) and members. A religious group may conduct worship services and rituals and teach religion to its members with requisite notification to authorities. It does not have legal status to open a bank account, own property, issue invitations to foreign guests, publish literature, receive tax benefits, or conduct worship services in prisons, state-owned hospitals, or the armed forces. To hold services, a religious group may use property bought

by its members for the group's use, residential property owned or rented by its members, or public spaces rented by its members.

An LRO may register with the MOJ if it has at least 10 citizen members who are 18 or older and are permanently residing in the region where the LRO applies to register. LROs have legal status and may open bank accounts, own property, issue invitation letters to foreign guests, publish literature, receive tax benefits, and conduct worship services in prisons, hospitals, and the armed forces. CROs may register with the MOJ at the regional or federal level by combining at least three LROs of the same denomination.

To register as an LRO or CRO, an association must provide the following: a list of the organization's founders and governing body with addresses and "internal passport" data (the mandatory identity document for all citizens older than the age of 14 residing in the country); the organization's charter; the minutes of the founding meeting; certification from the CRO (in the case of LROs); a description of the organization's doctrine, practices, history, and attitudes toward family, marriage, and education; the organization's legal address; a certificate of payment of government dues; and the charter or registration papers of the governing body in the case of organizations whose main offices are located abroad. Authorities may deny registration for reasons including incorrect paperwork, failure to meet different administrative requirements, national security reasons, or placement on the list of extremist or terrorist organizations. Denial of registration may be appealed in court. By law, CROs and LROs receiving funding from abroad must report an account of their activities, a list of leaders, the source of foreign funding, and plans for how the organization intends to use the foreign funds or property obtained through foreign funding. Reports are annual by default, but the MOJ may require additional ad hoc reports. LROs and CROs may invite foreign citizens to carry out professional religious activities. LROs and CROs may produce, acquire, export, import, and distribute religious literature in printed, audio, or video format, and "other religious items."

The Expert Religious Studies Council, a committee established by the MOJ to advise it on religious groups, has wide powers to investigate religious organizations. Some of the council's powers include reviewing organizations' activities and literature and determining whether an organization is "extremist." The law provides several examples of extremist activities, such as "incitement to violence," but does not precisely define how organizations or religious materials may be classified as "extremist." The council also advises the MOJ on the issue of granting religious organization status to a religious group.

Foreign religious organizations (those created outside of the country under foreign laws) have the right to open offices for representational purposes, either independently or as part of religious organizations previously established in the country, but they may not form or found their own religious organizations in the country and may not operate houses of worship.

The government (the MOJ or the Prosecutor General's Office) oversees a religious organization's compliance with the law and may review its financial and registration-related documents when conducting an inspection or investigation. With advance notice, the government may send representatives to attend a religious association's events, conduct an annual review of compliance with the association's mission statement on file with the government, and review its religious literature to decide whether the literature is extremist. The law contains ongoing reporting requirements on financial and economic activity, funding sources, and compliance with antiterrorist and anti-extremist legislation. The government may obtain a court order to close those associations that do not comply with reporting or other legal requirements.

The law allows the government to limit the places where prayer and public religious observance may be conducted without prior approval. LROs and CROs may conduct religious services and ceremonies without prior approval in buildings and facilities or on lands owned or rented by these associations, as well as in cemeteries, crematoria, places of pilgrimage, and living quarters. Baptism ceremonies in rivers and lakes, as well as services conducted in parks, open spaces, or courtyards, do not fall under this exemption. In these cases, LROs and CROs must seek government approval at least one week in advance and provide the government with the names of organizers and participants, as well as copies of any written materials to be used at the event.

A prime ministerial decree requires religious organizations to conform to specific counterterrorism measures to qualify for safety permits for their real property. Among other requirements, all facilities must be guarded during services by members of public organizations. Facilities with maximum building occupancy limits between 500 and 1,000 must have "panic buttons" and video surveillance systems. Buildings with occupancy limits of more than 1,000 must be guarded by private security guards or National Guard personnel. Religious groups are responsible for defraying the costs of these measures. The penalty for noncompliance is a fine of up to 100,000 rubles (\$1,300).

The Ministry of Defense chaplaincy program only allows for chaplains representing the four traditional religions, and the program requires members of a religious group to comprise at least 10 percent of a military unit before an official chaplain of that group is appointed. Chaplains are neither enlisted nor commissioned but are classified as assistants to the commander. Chaplains are full-time employees of the Ministry of Defense, paid from the defense budget. There are more than 120 chaplains in the program.

Federal law defines “missionary activity” as the sharing of one’s beliefs with persons of another faith or nonbelievers with the aim of involving these individuals in the “structure” of the religious association. According to the law, to share beliefs outside of officially sanctioned sites (which include buildings owned by a religious organization, buildings whose owners have given permission for activities to take place, pilgrimage destinations, cemeteries and crematoria, and indoor spaces of educational organizations historically used for religious ceremonies), an individual must have a document from a religious group or registered organization authorizing him or her to share beliefs. The law explicitly prohibits any beliefs being shared on another organization’s property without permission from that organization. It also prohibits missionary activity in residential buildings and the rezoning of any building from residential to nonresidential for the purpose of conducting religious activities. Materials disseminated by missionaries must be marked with the name of the religious association providing the authorization.

Violations of the law regulating missionary activity may be punished by a fine of 5,000 to 50,000 rubles (\$67-\$670) for individuals and 100,000 to 1,000,000 rubles (\$1,300-\$13,000) for legal entities, which includes LROs and CROs. Foreign citizens or stateless persons who violate restrictions on missionary activities may be fined 30,000 to 50,000 rubles (\$400-\$670) and are subject to deportation.

Within the MOJ, the Scientific Advisory Board reviews religious materials for extremism. Composed of academics and representatives of the four traditional religions, the board reviews materials referred to it by judicial or law enforcement authorities, private citizens, or organizations. If the board identifies material as extremist, it issues a nonbinding advisory opinion, which is then published on the MOJ website and forwarded to the prosecutor’s office for further investigation. In addition to the Scientific Advisory Board, regional board experts also may review religious materials for extremist content.

Prosecutors may take material to a court and ask the court to declare it extremist, but a court may declare extremist, on its own accord, materials introduced during the consideration of administrative, civil, or criminal cases. By law, publications declared extremist by a federal court are automatically added to the federal list of extremist materials. Courts may order internet service providers to block access to websites containing materials included on the federal list of extremist materials. Courts review and reissue lists on a regular basis. If the courts determine the material is no longer “extremist,” the MOJ is required to remove the material from the lists within 30 days. Very rarely, in response to a legal challenge, courts may also reverse a decision to list a material as extremist. The law makes it illegal to declare the key texts (holy books) of the four traditional religions in their “original languages” – Old and New Testaments of the Bible, Quran, and Tibetan Buddhist Kangyur (Kanjur) – to be extremist. The law does not define what constitutes an original language nor does it specify that foreign-language translations of these texts may not be declared extremist.

According to the administrative code, mass distribution, production, and possession with the aim of mass distribution of extremist materials by private individuals may result in 15 days’ imprisonment or a fine of 1,000 to 3,000 rubles (\$13-\$40), or 2,000 to 5,000 rubles (\$27-\$67) for public officials, as well as confiscation of these materials. Courts may suspend for 90 days the operations of legal entities found to be in possession of extremist materials and fine them 100,000 to 1,000,000 rubles (\$1,300-\$13,300). Individuals who produce materials later deemed extremist may not be punished retroactively but must cease production and distribution of those materials.

On October 3, amendments to the law came into force formally prohibiting certain individuals from leading or participating in a group of believers. The law prohibits individuals suspected of financing terrorism, or whose actions have been deemed extremist by a court, to lead or take part in religious groups. The amendments also impose extra training and recertification requirements on clergy, religious teachers, and missionaries who have been trained abroad. Such personnel must take part in a course in “state-confessional relations in the Russian Federation” and be recertified by a CRO.

The law allows the transfer of state and municipal property of religious significance to religious organizations, including land, buildings, and movable property. The law grants religious organizations using state historical property for religious purposes the right to use such property indefinitely. The law prohibits the transfer of living quarters for religious use and the use of living quarters for

missionary activity, unless the activity is a part of a “religious service, rite, or ceremony.”

The law allows religious organizations to use buildings that were not originally authorized for religious purposes if they are part of a property that serves a religious purpose. The law allows, for example, a group to establish a Sunday school in a warehouse on the property of a church. If such a structure does not meet legal requirements or is not brought into legal compliance by submitting proper paperwork by 2030, it will be demolished.

Religious education or civil ethics classes are compulsory in all public and private secondary schools. Students may choose to take a course on one of the four traditional religions, a general world religions course, or a secular ethics course. Regional and municipal departments of education oversee this curriculum at the local level in accordance with their capacity to offer the courses and according to the religious makeup of the given location. There is no requirement for representatives of religious organizations to be licensed to conduct religious education in schools affiliated with a religious organization or in-home schools. Religious instructors in any other state or private school must be licensed to teach religious courses.

The Office of the Director of Religious Issues within the Office of the Federal Human Rights Ombudsman handles complaints about the government’s actions on religious freedom. The ombudsman may intercede on behalf of those who submit complaints; however, the ombudsman may not compel other government bodies to act or intervene in complaints not addressed to the government.

The law entitles individuals and organizations to take religious freedom cases to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) in Strasbourg, France. The state must pay compensation to a person whose rights were violated as determined by the ECHR and ensure his or her rights are restored to the extent possible. The Constitutional Court determines whether judgments by international and regional courts, including the ECHR, are consistent with the constitution.

Military service for men between the ages of 18 and 27 is compulsory, but the constitution provides for alternative service for those who refuse to bear arms for reasons of conscience, including religious belief. The standard military service period is 12 months, while alternative service is 18 months in a Ministry of Defense agency or 21 months in a nondefense agency. Failure to perform

alternative service is punishable under the criminal code, with penalties ranging from a fine of 80,000 rubles (\$1,100) to six months in prison.

By law, LROs and CROs may not participate in political campaigns or the activities of political parties or movements or provide material or other aid to political groups. This restriction applies to religious organizations but not to their individual members.

Both the ROC and all members of the Civic Chamber, a state institution composed of representatives of public associations, are granted the opportunity to review draft legislation pending before the State Duma, the lower house of parliament, on a case-by-case basis. No formal mechanism exists for permanent representation of religious organizations in the Civic Chamber, as the chamber convenes for three-year terms. Individuals from traditional religions and other religious groups may be selected to serve in the chamber for a term, either in the initial selection of 40 representatives by the President of the Russian Federation or in one of the subsequent rounds of selection, where existing chamber members choose an additional 128 representatives representing national and regional civil society groups. By law, a member of an organization that had been accused of extremism may not serve in the Civic Chamber.

The law states foreigners or stateless individuals whose presence in the country the government deems “undesirable” are forbidden from becoming founders, members, or active participants in the activities of religious organizations. The same is true for individuals whose activities are deemed extremist by the courts or who are subject to prosecution under the law on combating money laundering and the financing of terrorism. The law restricts any foreign national or stateless person from entering the country if he or she “participates in the activities of the organizations included in the list of organizations and individuals in respect of whom there is information about their involvement in extremist activities or terrorism.”

Foreigners engaging in religious work require a contract with a legally registered religious organization and a work visa. Religious work is not permitted on “humanities visas,” which allow foreigners to enter the country to strengthen academic or cultural ties or take part in charitable work. There are no missionary visas.

The law grants religious organizations the exclusive right to manage pilgrimage activities.

Under the criminal code, an individual convicted of committing an act of vandalism motivated by religious hatred or enmity may be sentenced to up to three years of compulsory labor or prison.

The country is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Government Practices

Religious groups and human rights NGOs reported authorities continued to investigate, detain, arrest, imprison, torture, and/or physically abuse persons on account of their religious belief or affiliation. Authorities continued to accuse religious minority groups of extremism and terrorism.

According to international religious freedom NGO Forum 18, the government used increasingly strict legislation on “foreign agents” and “undesirable organizations” to curtail, complicate, or prohibit the activities of organizations that promote human rights, including freedom of religion and belief, and to monitor their violation. In December, the Supreme Court ordered the closure of Memorial, one of the country’s best-known NGOs.

As of November 9, Memorial identified 340 persons persecuted for their religious belief or affiliation whom it considered to be political prisoners, meaning they were either already imprisoned or were in custody or under house arrest awaiting a formal sentence to begin. Memorial stated that the actual number of cases of persecution was likely three to four times higher, given the number of cases the organization identified as similar to those designated as political prisoners; however, the organization said it lacked the supporting evidence to make designations in those instances. Memorial’s list of political prisoners included 206 persons (45 percent more than in 2020) accused of involvement with the banned Hizb ut-Tahrir, an organization that Memorial characterized as a “nonviolent international Islamic organization,” and 104 Jehovah’s Witnesses (70 percent more than in 2020). According to Memorial, none of the political prisoners being persecuted for their religious belief or affiliation called for violence or planned violent acts.

In August, Forum 18 reported Jehovah’s Witnesses and Muslims who had been convicted of “extremism” might suffer post-sentence consequences through *sudimost* (being a convicted person with an active criminal record). The report stated that after their release, these individuals risked harsher punishment if

prosecuted again and might experience more limited formal employment opportunities. The courts might also impose restrictions on freedom and administrative supervision, including curfews, restrictions on movement, and an obligation to register with police or probation authorities at specified intervals. These individuals might also be subject to bans on leadership of, or participation in, religious organizations.

Jehovah's Witnesses and NGOs stated Federal Security Service (FSB) agents, officers of the Interior Ministry's Center for Countering Extremism, police officers, and riot police continued to monitor, detain, search, and carry out raids in the homes and places of worship of Jehovah's Witnesses. The NGO Human Rights Without Frontiers stated authorities had raided more than 1,594 homes of Jehovah's Witnesses throughout the country between early 2017 and November 2021. Jehovah's Witnesses reported 382 searches of homes during the year, compared with 477 in 2020. They said that during these raids, authorities entered homes, often in the early morning, conducted unauthorized, illegal searches, tortured, and verbally and physically abused members. Authorities often entered residences by forcing open the door. They held individuals at gunpoint, including children and the elderly, and seized personal belongings, including religious materials, personal correspondence, money, mobile phones, and other electronic devices.

In January, authorities dropped charges against Jehovah's Witness Vadim Kutsenko. Jehovah's Witnesses stated authorities detained Kutsenko in 2020, subjecting him to electric shocks and forcing him to confess that he had organized activities of a religious organization banned by the court, before placing him under house arrest and eventually releasing him on his own recognizance.

On September 4, Russian human rights NGO OVD-info reported searches of Jehovah's Witnesses' homes in Irkutsk by the Russian National Guard and the Ministry of Interior's Grom special forces. OVD-info said during the searches special forces beat and then detained Jehovah's Witnesses Anatoly Razdabarov and Nikolai Merinov. Officers stabbed Merinov, beat him unconscious, and broke his front teeth. Officers interrogated Razdabarov for eight hours and demanded access to his telephone. They beat Razdabrov, handcuffed him so his shoulders hyperextended, and sodomized him with a glass bottle. According to the NGO, officers also beat the two men's wives while they were in various stages of undress. On October 12, a court in Irkutsk refused to recognize the searches of these homes as an illegal action by the security forces, though the security forces did not show search warrants during the raids.

The SOVA Center reported that on December 15, authorities searched 10 homes and interrogated 16 Jehovah's Witnesses in Samara. The authorities forced Nikolai Vasilyev and another unnamed Jehovah's Witness to hold a heated kettle and poured boiling water on him after he refused to provide the authorities access to a laptop. Vasilyev and two others were arrested and sentenced to two months in jail; the case continued at year's end.

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In April, authorities conducted mass searches in Yaroslavl, searching 31 premises and detaining at least two men. In July, officials conducted mass searches in Kurgan, Shadrinsk, and other cities in Kurgan Region. The European Association of Jehovah's Witnesses reported that authorities detained at least 13 persons. Authorities said the detainees held meetings for more than 130 individuals.

On May 12, the newspaper *Novaya Gazeta* reported that FSB operatives installed hidden cameras in a Perm bathhouse to monitor possible baptisms. The recording captured 27 Jehovah's Witnesses participating in a baptism ceremony, leading five members to be charged. The Industrial District Court of Perm sentenced one participant in the ceremony to seven years' probation, and each of the other four to two and a half years' probation. Authorities charged each defendant with participating in illegal religious activities as well as organizing, funding, and participating in the extremist community.

Jehovah's Witnesses representatives said group members continued to flee the country as a result of what they described as increasing government persecution since a 2017 Supreme Court ruling banned the organization. In March, *Foreign Policy* magazine estimated more than 175,000 Jehovah's Witnesses remained in Russia.

The SOVA Center reported authorities had initiated criminal cases against at least 142 Jehovah's Witnesses during the year; in 2020, the number was at least 146. Since 2017, according to Jehovah's Witnesses cited in the SOVA Center report, authorities had initiated 597 criminal cases against adherents in 70 regions of the country. The NGO Memorial reported 104 imprisoned Jehovah's Witnesses as of

November 9 (35 serving sentences, 69 in custody or under house arrest pending sentencing), with 86 others receiving suspended sentences during the year. In addition, according to the SOVA Center, during the year at least 68 convictions were handed down against 105 Jehovah's Witnesses, compared with 25 sentences in 2020.

On January 19, the Kemerovo Regional Court rejected an appeal by Jehovah's Witnesses Sergei Britvin and Vadim Levchuk, who had both been sentenced to four years' imprisonment at a labor camp for organizing the activities of a banned extremist organization. On December 30, both men were released, having served their sentences.

In February, the Abinsk District Court of Krasnodar sentenced Jehovah's Witness Alexander Ivshin to seven and a half years in a penal colony for organizing the activities of an extremist organization.

On February 10, the Kursk Regional Court upheld a 2020 decision by the Lgov District Court denying Jehovah's Witness and Danish citizen Dennis Christensen's appeal for early release. Detained since 2017, Christensen received a six-year prison sentence in 2019. He remained in prison at year's end.

On February 24, the Abakan City Court in the Republic of Khakassia sentenced Jehovah's Witnesses Valentina Baranovskaya to two years, and her son, Roman Baranovskiy, to six years in a penal colony based on the government's designation of the group as extremist.

The Central District Court of Chita began proceedings against four Jehovah's Witnesses charged with organizing the activities of a banned organization: Vladimir Ermolaev, Sergey Kirilyuk, Igor Mamalimov, and Aleksandr Putintsev. The four were detained in mass raids in 2020; the case remained pending at year's end.

In April, the Investigative Committee for the Krasnodar Territory announced that Abinsk District had opened criminal cases against four Jehovah's Witnesses for participating in the activities of an extremist organization: Anna Yermak, Olga Pnonmareva, Alexander Nikolaev, and an unnamed individual.

On May 28, authorities opened a criminal case against Anna Safronova, accusing her of participating in worship services of Jehovah's Witnesses and financing extremist activities. The case was ongoing at year's end.

On June 30, the Blagoveshchensk City Court sentenced Jehovah's Witnesses Dmitriy Golik and Aleksey Berchuk to seven and eight years in prison, respectively, for organizing the activities of an extremist organization. The Amur Regional Court denied their appeal on September 2; the two were transferred from pretrial detention to prison.

On July 29, the Leninsky District Court of Rostov-on-Don sentenced Jehovah's Witnesses Arsen Avanesov, Vilen Avanesov, and Alexander Parkov to terms of between six and six and a half years in prison for organizing the activities of an extremist organization. The defendants had been arrested in 2019 and remained in jail pending trial. On December 6, the Rostov Regional Court upheld the verdict on appeal.

On September 23, the Traktorozavodsky District Court of Volgograd sentenced Jehovah's Witnesses Sergey Melnik and Igor Egozaryan to six years in prison for organizing the activities of an extremist organization. Valery Rogozin, Vyacheslav Osipov, and Denis Peresunko were also found guilty of financing extremist activities. Rogzin received a sentence of six and a half years; Peresunko and Osipov were each sentenced to six years and three months.

In October, after a year-long case, the Trusovsky District Court of Astrakhan sentenced Jehovah's Witnesses Sergei Klikunov, Rustam Diarov, and Yevgeny Ivanov to eight years in prison – the longest sentences yet issued to Jehovah's Witnesses – and Ivanov's wife, Olga, to three and a half years in prison. The three men had been in jail since June and charged with organizing and financing extremist activities; Olga had been under house arrest and charged with participation in extremist activities. The court also cited “the commission of a crime as part of a group, by prior conspiracy” as an aggravating circumstance for all four sentences.

On October 28, the Supreme Court decreed that “the actions of persons not related to the continuation or resumption of the activities of an organization recognized by the court as extremist and consisting solely in the exercise of their right to freedom of conscience and freedom of religion ... do not constitute an offense.” On October 28, the SOVA Center stated the wording of the decision of the Supreme Court was not ideal and “unlikely to completely eliminate the numerous cases of persecution for essentially noncriminal activities.” The SOVA Center reported that at the end of 2021, Jehovah's Witness Dmitry Barmakin was acquitted by the Supreme Court and several other cases of Jehovah's Witnesses were slated for review.

In the month following the Supreme Court's October 28 ruling, authorities raided the homes of 25 Jehovah's Witnesses across 10 different regions, and courts convicted or upheld the convictions of at least seven members of the group on charges of extremist activity, including an 80-year-old woman who was fined 500,000 rubles (\$6,700). In November, the Pervorechka District Court of Vladivostok acquitted a Jehovah's Witness, Dmitry Barmakin, who had been accused of extremist activity – reportedly the first acquittal based on the October Supreme Court decision.

In November, authorities announced completion of the investigation of the 10 Jehovah's Witnesses detained during raids in Voronezh in 2020 who were accused of organizing a banned community and preaching and recruiting new members between 2018 and 2020. The case was pending in the Levoberezhny District Court of Voronezh at year's end.

Felix Makhmadiyev, a Jehovah's Witness who was stripped of his citizenship following his 2019 conviction for organizing extremist activities, was deported to Uzbekistan on January 21. Makhmadiyev had moved to the country from Uzbekistan with his mother as a minor and subsequently became a Russian citizen. Konstantin Bazhenov, who was convicted in the same case as Makhmadiyev, was also stripped of his Russian citizenship; he was deported to Ukraine on May 19.

According to the NGO Memorial, between January and November, authorities convicted, investigated, or charged 18 persons for alleged involvement with Hizb ut-Tahrir, nine of whom were from Crimea. Since the Supreme Court first labeled the group a terrorist organization and banned it in 2003, Memorial reported that authorities had investigated or charged 331 persons for involvement with Hizb-ut-Tahrir and tried and convicted 258. Since 2003, courts had sentenced 70 persons to between 10 and 15 years in prison, and 87 to 15 years or more. The SOVA Center reported that at least 35 defendants in new cases were arrested during the year. Human Rights Watch characterized Hizb ut-Tahrir as a group that aimed to establish an Islamic caliphate, but which renounced violence.

The SOVA Center reported that on February 18, the FSB conducted a special operation against Hizb u-Tahrir across 10 regions of the country. The FSB detained alleged members, and authorities opened criminal cases against seven of them. Individuals continued to receive long prison sentences for their alleged involvement with Hizb-ut-Tahrir.

In April, the Central District Military Court in Yekaterinburg sentenced Rais Mavlyutov to 23 years in a maximum security penal colony after convicting him of recruiting for a terrorist organization, using the internet to incite terrorism, and organizing and participating in meetings where the literature of a terrorist organization, Hizb ut-Tahrir, was read and discussed. Memorial classified Mavlyutov as a political prisoner and stated there was no evidence that he represented a public danger or was involved in terrorist activities.

On September 6, the Oktyabrsky District Court of Ufa sentenced Ilmira Bikbaeva to three years' probation for transferring money to the mother of Ayrat Dilmukhametov, a prisoner accused of supporting Hizb ut-Tahrir. The prosecution said the transfer was proof that Bikbaeva was financing extremism. Bikbaeva said she simply wanted to help the mother who lacked the means to support herself.

On December 24, the Second Western District Military Court of Moscow sentenced Marifjon Mamadaliyev and Ikboljon Sultonov to terms of between 16 and 18 years in a penal colony for allegedly creating a Hizb ut-Tahrir cell. The court convicted six additional defendants of participating in the activities of the cell and sentenced them to imprisonment for terms of 11 to 12 years. The SOVA Center stated the case was based on testimony by a secret witness.

In July, the Court of Kemerovo upheld the designation of the Falun Gong branch in the Khakassia Region as an extremist organization and ordered its dissolution there.

The government prosecuted 13 cases under the law prohibiting offending the feelings of believers, two more than in 2020. According to Memorial, investigating authorities increased activity during the year, including internet monitoring. For example, on October 29, Moscow's Tverskoy District Court sentenced blogger Ruslan Bobiev and his girlfriend, Anastasia Chistova, to 10 months in a penal colony for violating the law. The teens posted a photograph with St. Basil's Cathedral in the background depicting Chistova wearing a jacket with the inscription "Police" while simulating a sex act, with Bobiev standing behind her. The Interior Ministry described the photos as "provocative," and the court stated the couple "committed public acts expressing clear disrespect for society and committed with the aim of insulting the religious feelings of believers." On October 30, police detained and charged Irina Volkova for posting a photo exposing her underwear in front of St. Isaac's Cathedral in St. Petersburg. On November 19, authorities in St. Petersburg opened a criminal case against two

teenagers in response to a photo circulating on social media, in which the two defendants posed with their pants down in front of the Church of the Savior on Spilled Blood.

In October, the authorities initiated a criminal case against Lolita Bogdanova for insulting the feelings of believers after she bared her chest in front of St. Basil's Cathedral in Moscow.

On October 25, the SOVA Center and human rights activists reported that staff at correctional colony No.2 in Kurgan Region mocked Muslim prisoners and threw the Quran on the ground, "trampling" it. Media reported that investigators said they found no evidence of the action as video from the surveillance cameras was destroyed.

On November 18, a court in Kurgan closed the Kurgan Orthodox Parish in Honor of the Holy Trinity. In July, the Kurgan Regional Court ordered the dissolution stating that the parish had misled Orthodox believers and infringed on their constitutional freedom of religion. The Magistrate Court of Kurgan had fined the church in 2020 for illegal missionary work. The parish was independent of the ROC.

In December, the ECHR ruled in favor of Maksim Mikhaylovich Yefimov in his case against the government for prosecuting him for hate speech in 2011 and dissolving his NGO, the Youth Human Rights Group in 2013. Authorities had charged Yefimov with offending the feelings of believers and extremist speech when he published an article criticizing the ROC. The court ruled that the government had violated Article 10 – dealing with freedom of expression – and Article 11 – dealing with freedom of association – of the European Convention on Human Rights and that the government should pay Yefimov 10,000 euros (\$11,300).

In November, the ECHR ruled in two separate cases that Russian authorities had violated the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion under the European Convention on Human Rights of members of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness and the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (Unification Church). In the latter case, the court also found the government had violated members' right to family life and a fair trial by arresting and deporting them. The court awarded 9,500 euros (\$10,800) in damages and expenses to the plaintiffs in the International Society for Krishna Consciousness

case and a total of 34,270 euros (\$38,900) to the plaintiffs in Unification Church case.

According to the MOJ, as of December 2020, there were 31,392 registered religious organizations (LROs and CROs) in the country, most of which were ROC-affiliated, compared with 31,379 in 2019.

According to the SOVA Center, registration was sometimes complicated by imprecise language in the laws regulating the activities of religious groups, LROs, and CROs, which left room for interpretation by local and national authorities.

The SOVA Center reported that in August, law enforcement officers checked the documents of those who had gathered for Friday prayers in several mosques in Moscow and the Moscow region, for example, in Kotelniki. The officers reportedly took a total of 140 persons to police stations, where they released Russian citizens after checking their documents. They released the foreigners after collecting their DNA.

In September, the government designated two Church of Scientology groups – World Institute of Scientology Enterprises International and the Church of Spiritual Technology – “undesirable organizations,” effectively banning Scientology within the country. According to the SOVA Center, the designation meant that the Church of Scientology must stop its activities in the country, and any cooperation with the group would be treated as an administrative or, in some cases, criminal offense.

In August, the government designated four evangelical groups (the New Generation International Christian Movement and the New Generation Evangelical Christian Church (from Latvia), and the New Generation Spiritual Directorate of the Evangelist Christians and the New Generation International Biblical College (from Ukraine) as “undesirable organizations.”

In December, security forces broke up a conference in Ramenskoye attended by Protestant clergy, including representatives of New Generation Churches; one participant was reportedly beaten.

The country’s 83 federal subjects (administrative divisions, excluding Russia-occupied Crimea and Sevastopol) maintained varying policies on the wearing of the hijab in public schools and/or government institutions. In January, a schoolgirl in a Tyumen secondary school was barred from attending classes due to a Ministry

of Education and Science policy that mandated students comply with “generally accepted norms of business style [dress] in society.” In March, a local Yekaterinburg media outlet published a report describing the ostracism experienced by Muslim women who chose to wear the hijab.

Representatives of minority religious associations and human rights NGOs stated authorities continued to prosecute individuals and smaller religious groups for “illegal” missionary work and frequently imposed fines. From July 2020 to December 2021, Forum 18 reported 108 prosecutions on administrative charges of unlawful missionary activity for a wide range of activities, including ordinary worship meetings. Forum 18 stated that more than 80 percent of defendants whose cases reached a verdict were found guilty and fined. Foreigners also faced possible expulsion. According to the SOVA Center, Protestant churches were the targets in the largest number of cases.

In September, the Yalta Judicial District Court fined the Christians of the Evangelical Faith of Yalta 30,000 rubles (\$400) for carrying out illegal missionary activity. According to press reports, the Fellowship of Christian Businessmen and Russian Church of Christians of Evangelical Faith Pentecostals were also prosecuted. In June, four evangelical Christian pastors and believers from Adygea faced administrative cases for illegal missionary activity. The accused faced fines ranging from five to 50,000 rubles (\$.07-\$670). In June, the Sovetsky District Court of Astrakhan found a U.S. citizen guilty of illegal missionary activity, fining him 30,000 rubles (\$400) and ordering his expulsion. In May, authorities charged Russian astrologer Ekaterina Kalinkina with illegal missionary work for promoting and organizing events for the Hindu festival of Maha Shivratri. Kalinkina faced a fine of 50,000 rubles (\$670) as she was not an authorized religious leader. In April, the Magistrate Court of Evpatoria Judicial District fined the Chava Nagila Synagogue 30,000 rubles (\$400) for illegal missionary work, finding that videos posted by the community on social media did not carry the full name of the organization.

Religious minorities said local authorities continued to use the country’s anti-extremism laws to ban sacred religious texts and other books related to religion, other than the four holy books – in their original languages – recognized by law. The MOJ’s list of extremist material grew during the year to 5,253 compared with 5,130 in 2020 according to SOVA Center reports.

In February, customs officials in Rostov-on-Don confiscated publications by Jehovah’s Witnesses from the library of the ship *Missia*, which arrived from the

Turkish port of Tuzla. On March 31, the Oktyabrsky District Court of St. Petersburg declared that the Jehovah's Witness Library mobile application containing the group's literature, including various translations of the Bible, was extremist. On September 27, the St. Petersburg City Court upheld the decision to ban distribution of the app in the country. On September 14, the Primorsky FSB border department searched four homes of Jehovah's Witnesses and confiscated electronic devices, Bibles, religious literature, and personal records in which they found mention of Jehovah.

On multiple occasions, authorities fined missionary organizations for violating legal requirements pertaining to missionary activity. On November 10, OVD-Info reported that the Magistrate's Court in Kabardino-Balkaria fined the Seventh-day Adventist Church 30,000 rubles (\$400) for distributing literature without special marking as part of missionary activity. On November 19, the Magistrate's Court in Kabardino-Balkaria also fined Seventh-day Adventist Nina Boronina for possessing Christian books about health in violation of the law. On September 15, the newspaper *Novaya Gazeta* reported as part of a commentary on persecution of religious believers in the country that authorities in Belgorod fined a Baptist individual for distributing free Bibles in the Sputnik shopping center.

The SOVA Center reported on October 7 that the Leninsky District Court of Stavropol fined the Orthodox Jewish Community of the Stavropol Territory 100,000 rubles (\$1,300) for keeping the book *Forcibly Baptized* by Markus Lehmann, which was included in the government's list of extremist materials, in its library. The SOVA Center stated there were no signs of incitement to religious or national hatred in the novel, which is about the persecution and discrimination of Jews in the 14th century in Poland and Lithuania.

Authorities classified literature related to Said Nursi as extremist. On April 22, the Naberezhnye Chelny City Court in Tatarstan designated 163 editions of the works of Nursi as extremist, according to the SOVA Center. The court accused the defendants in the case of participating in the "Nurdzhular" organization, a Muslim organization that the Supreme Court declared extremist.

There were several other instances of restrictions on Islamic literature. The SOVA Center reported on July 14 that the Sernursky District Court in Mari El fined Rosalia Timurgalieva for distributing extremist materials after she posted the film "Miracles of the Koran," which the center said contained no calls to violence or discriminatory content, on social media. In April, the Yoshkar-Ola City Court

fined Valea Takhmazova and Izzatilo Isakov 1,000 rubles (\$13) each for the same offense.

In January, Muslim community leaders criticized the decision by city authorities in Rostov-on-Don to transform the former Cathedral Mosque into a jazz school. The mosque had been closed during the Soviet era and utilized by the army; in 2016 the Muslim community in Rostov asked for the building's return.

In November, residents of Troitsk near Moscow complained to the city administration about an unofficial mosque – a residential building in which Muslims gathered for prayer. The residents said the mosque led to traffic disruptions. City officials reportedly determined the building was an illegal structure and planned to demolish it. There were no other mosques in the city. The case continued at year's end.

On November 19, Ildar Alyautdinov, the Mufti of Moscow and the main imam of the Moscow Cathedral Mosque, proposed opening prayer rooms in shopping centers and the subway instead of in residential buildings. He stated that Moscow did not have enough local mosques for resident Muslims and migrants, and the rooms would allow Muslims to perform prayers at the right times without eliciting negative reactions from others. In response, the press service of the Moscow Department of Transport stated that it was impossible to allocate “premises and places for religious actions of people of all views in public transport.”

In August, Ryazan authorities denied a request from Dmitry Pakhamov, cochairman of the Christianity and Islam Association and head of the International Christian Solidarity Foundation, to build an Islamic cultural and educational center in the city. Officials responded that there were no free plots suitable for the construction of a religious facility.

In August, Samara city government authorities ordered the demolition of a Pentecostal Good News Church in Mekhzavod as an illegal building, saying the area was zoned for residential use.

On November 12, the Leninsky District Court of Nizhny Novgorod charged Kirill Evstigneev with providing financial services deliberately intended to support an extremist organization, for paying rent for a meeting place for Jehovah's Witnesses.

On November 2, the Kuznetsk District Court of Novokuznetsk prohibited the Orthodox diocese from operating a chapel, citing a violation of fire safety rules.

The NGO Alliance Defending Freedom International (ADF) stated it had filed two cases with the ECHR on behalf of the Word of Life church in Kaluga – a Pentecostal church in a dispute with local authorities over ownership and building code violations which blocked efforts to convert a building to a meeting place for their community. Worshipers reportedly were meeting in a tent outside the property pending resolution of the case.

ADF's 2019 application to the ECHR on behalf of Pastor Vitaliy Bak remained pending at year's end. Bak, a Baptist community leader whom the Novorossiysk city administration accused of holding illegal worship services in his home, faced the possibility that his house would be demolished; local authorities closed the house in July 2019. The ADF stated the authorities' actions violated freedom of religion.

According to NGOs and independent experts, the government continued to cooperate more closely with the ROC than with other religious organizations, with officials often interpreting the law that recognized the "special role" of Orthodox Christianity as granting special privileges or benefits to the ROC as an institution. Georgetown University's Berkley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs stated in a report in May that "the Kremlin continues to deepen its reliance on the Russian Orthodox Church-Moscow Patriarchate (ROC) as a lever of soft power in Russian foreign policy." In a July interview posted on the ROC website, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov cited the existence of a Working Group for Cooperation between the foreign ministry and the ROC. In June, ROC Patriarch Kirill presented Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu with an ROC medal for "supervision of the construction of the main temple of the Russian Armed Forces." He thanked Shoigu for his contribution to "this new way of interaction between the Church and the armed forces." Patriarch Kirill also presented awards to two deputy defense ministers. The government continued to provide the ROC Patriarch with security guards and access to official vehicles, a privilege accorded to no other religious organization. According to the SOVA Center, the ROC had received more government-granted property than any other religious organization.

In January, the Verkhnepyshminsky City Court sentenced an assistant to former ROC priest Shiigumen Sergiy to 15 days administrative arrest for inciting hatred through uploading a video on social media, a punishment that does not involve

criminal charges. The ROC had banned him from preaching. Sergey refused to leave the Sredeuralsk Convent in a dispute over the property.

On February 10, the Sverdlovsk Arbitration Court recognized the Sredneuralsk Convent as property of the ROC Yekaterinburg Diocese. The ROC had filed a claim for recognition of ownership in 2020.

Forum 18 raised concerns about amendments to the law in October which required clergy, missionaries, or religious teachers who received their religious training outside the country to enroll in a class on state-confessional relations and obtain recertification by a CRO. The NGO criticized what it said was the vague wording of the amendments, which left interpretation to law enforcement authorities. According to Forum 18, the majority of religious educational establishments appeared ineligible to offer such courses as they lacked state accreditation. Baptist, Pentecostal, and Lutheran seminaries all lost their higher education licenses by May. Forum 18 stated the amendments would affect some communities more than others; for example, the majority of Russia's Buddhist leaders had trained outside Russia. Sergey Gavrilov, head of the State Duma's Committee for the Development of Civil Society and Issues of Public and Religious Associations, stated in an April 5 press release that the (then proposed) amendments were "aimed at protecting the spiritual sovereignty of Russia" and would "take into account Russian legal, moral, and cultural traditions."

The country's National Security Strategy, approved in July, included the prevention of the spread of religious radicalism, destructive religious movements, and formation of ethnic and religious enclaves as measures to ensure security.

The *Jerusalem Post* and Forum 18 reported that antisemitism was rising in the political sphere. In February, an Anti-Defamation League report criticized the Russian government for instrumentalizing antisemitism to influence domestic and foreign public opinion in its conflict with Ukraine by exaggerating the prevalence of antisemitism in that country.

In January, St. Petersburg State University of Economics and Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration Professor Vladimir Matveyev publicly denied the Holocaust during a webinar. Matveyev stated Zionists invented the Holocaust, as "it was impossible to pass six million victims through all the concentration camps." Other webinar participants contested the statements. Both institutions fired him in February, and a court denied his request for reinstatement. Matveyev was charged with rehabilitation of Nazism, and his

case remained pending at year's end. If convicted, he could face up to three years in prison.

In August, Russia Religious News reported Foreign Minister Lavrov commented that the ROC was “suffering from (unspecified) pressure by Western countries.”

At an October 21 plenary session of the 18th annual meeting of the Valdai International Discussion club, President Vladimir Putin stated that Russians were guided by a moral and spiritual conservatism and must defend “true values” from “adherents of the so-called social progress,” whom he compared to the Bolsheviks, whose quest for progress a century ago became an effort to destroy “age-old values and religion.”

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

In December, the Pervomaisky District Court of Krasnodar sentenced Zoya Malova, a member of the “Citizens of the USSR” movement, to six years in prison for attempting to organize a contract killing of the head of the Jewish Community of Krasnodar. The case against her codefendant, Alexander Dudrenko, remained pending at year's end. The SOVA Center stated antisemitism is a part of the group's ideology.

In August, a man assaulted 82-year-old Vladimir Tselin and shouted antisemitic threats at him. The case was under investigation at year's end.

In November, the Izamilovo District Court sentenced Father Sergy Romanov, a former member of the ROC hierarchy, to four years in prison on charges of vigilantism, violating the right to religious freedom, and encouraging suicide. He had been arrested in December 2020 on suspicion of encouraging minors to commit suicide in his sermon entitled “For Faith in Christ, Let Us Face Death” that was posted on YouTube. In 2020, the Verkhnepyshminsky City Court had fined Romanov after he made antisemitic remarks in a sermon, and a diocesan court in the Sverdlovsk Region stripped him of his religious rank.

In October, interfaith representatives took part in the first session of the Interreligious Group for the Protection of Rights and Believers from Discrimination and Xenophobia of the Council for Interaction with Religious Associations. The council is under the authority of the Russian president.

According to a December survey conducted by the Levada Center, 29 percent of respondents agreed that the ROC had too large an influence on state policies, an increase from 17 percent in 2016.

Also in December, 22 percent of respondents surveyed by the Levada Center professed a negative attitude towards Jews, compared with 34 percent in a survey by the same organization in 2010.

The SOVA Center reported several cases of antisemitic vandalism. In March, vandals drew a swastika on the gates of the Lyceum of Information Technologies in Novosibirsk.

On April 20, Hitler's birthday, press reported that unknown persons set on fire the Shamir Jewish Community Center in Moscow, damaging the building's balcony. The perpetrators also spray painted a swastika and the word "death" on the building. Also in April, a vandal painted antisemitic statements on the memorial to the victims of the Holocaust in Pushkin.

According to the SOVA Center, authorities investigated antisemitic social media posts. In September, the Leninsky District Court in Smolensk agreed to hear a case against an individual who posted texts calling for antisemitic violence. Also in September, the Gusinoozyorsky City Court sentenced an individual to two and a half years in prison for posting statements advocating violence against Jews. In October, the Taganrog City Court of Rostov Region gave Sergei Shurygin a suspended sentence for creating and leading an antisemitic movement on social media. Shurygin was not incarcerated but had to report to the penitentiary once a month.

The SOVA Center reported seven cases of vandalism against religious sites in the first six months of the year: two Orthodox, two Jewish, two pagan, and one Protestant. In all of 2020, the SOVA Center reported 29 incidents of religiously motivated vandalism.

Vandals also targeted other religious institutions and symbols. In May, vandals painted a swastika on the wall of a disused church in Bronnitsa. On August 30, vandals painted offensive inscriptions on the pagan temple in Bitsevsky Park in Moscow. In June, vandals poured urine on the site.

In July, the Jewish community of Perm received a permit for construction of a Jewish Community center. The SOVA Center stated that for several years, a group had opposed construction of the center.

On August 18, vandals desecrated the cemetery near the Trinity Cathedral in Nevel, knocking down crosses and damaging 16 tombstones. Police detained local residents.

In September, vandals painted offensive inscriptions on the walls of a chapel and spring in Bogdanovka. They reportedly also poured diesel fuel into the church's well and the chapel's font.

In October, authorities in Arkhangelsk opened a case against an individual for posting texts "against Orthodox believers."

In February, two persons shot an air gun at a grocery store containing a halal market in St. Petersburg.

Local residents opposed the construction of churches, mosques, and other places of worship in Nizhny Novgorod, Ulyanovsk, Stupino, Irkutsk. For example, in St. Petersburg, local residents opposed the construction of the Exaltation of the Cross Church on Krestovsky Island. According to the SOVA Center, those opposed often complained about the choice of construction sites and the absence of public hearings. In addition, the center stated public protests against the construction of mosques "often raise xenophobic arguments." In Stupino, for example, after buildings formerly used by the military were transferred to the Muslim community for the creation of an Islamic center; opponents distributed leaflets claiming the center could have a negative impact on interethnic conflicts and could lead to the introduction of "sharia norms." Some members of the city council supported opponents of the construction. In Kazan, townspeople opposed the site chosen for construction of a mosque; debate was continuing at year's end.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

The U.S. Ambassador, embassy representatives, and Department of State officials in Washington, D.C. advocated greater religious freedom in the country, highlighting the government's misuse of the laws on extremism and terrorism to restrict the peaceful activities of religious minorities.

In August, the government prohibited the embassy from retaining, hiring, or contracting Russian or third-country staff, with the exception of security guards. As a result, 182 local employees ceased to be employed at U.S. diplomatic facilities in Moscow, Vladivostok, and Yekaterinburg. In addition, the government continued to limit the number of U.S. diplomats in the country. These constraints, combined with authorities' efforts to intimidate civil society, minority religious groups, and all voices of dissent, limited embassy outreach efforts to religious and civil society groups. Department of State officials continued to monitor the situation of U.S. citizens working with religious institutions and organizations in the country to ensure authorities did not improperly target them for their faith or religious work.

On February 12, embassy social media highlighted the Department of State's condemnation of Russia's continued crackdown on Jehovah's Witnesses and other peaceful religious minorities.

In a February 25 press statement, the Department of State criticized the sentencing of Jehovah's Witnesses Valentina Baranovskaya and her son Roman Baranovsky to two and six years, respectively, in a penal colony, based solely on the Russian government's designation of the group as extremist. The embassy posted the statement on social media.

On May 13, the embassy posted on social media a statement of U.S. support for the rights of all people – in Russia and around the world – to exercise their right to freedom of religion or belief. The embassy also posted the Secretary of State's statement on the release of the 2020 International Religious Freedom report.

In July, embassy social media highlighted the Department of State's criticism of the sentencing of two Jehovah's Witnesses to terms of seven and eight years in prison.

On July 9, a statement by the Department of State expressed concern about the Khakassia regional branch of Falun Gong's continued "extremist" designation, and Russian authorities' harassment of Falun Gong practitioners for peaceful activities such as meditation and possessing spiritual texts. The statement called on the Russian government to stop abusing the "extremist" label to restrict human rights and freedoms.

On September 3, embassy officers met with representatives of several minority religious groups to discuss operating conditions in the country and to promote interfaith dialogue.

On September 15, the Ambassador met with ROC Metropolitan Hilarion to discuss the Church's role in society, its stance on religious freedom within the country, and the cultural and religious ties between the ROC and the Orthodox Church of America.

On October 15, embassy social media highlighted the Department of State's condemnation of the beating and torture of Jehovah's Witnesses in Irkutsk. An October 28 embassy tweet conveyed deep concern about the sentencing of three Jehovah's Witnesses to eight years in prison for practicing their faith.

On December 7, the Ambassador attended the St. Catherine's Day Patronal Liturgy at St. Catherine's Church in Moscow and delivered public remarks on the importance of religious freedom.

In December, embassy and Department of State representatives held meetings with Jehovah's Witnesses representatives and Church of Scientology representatives.

The embassy communicated the importance of religious freedom by celebrating major religious holidays of Christians, Jews, and Muslims via its social media platforms. These messages included video greetings from the Ambassador to mark Easter and the end of Ramadan; posts marking the contributions of various religious groups to American history and culture; and posts highlighting events that underscored tolerance and that commemorated victims of violence motivated by religious hatred. Additional examples included highlighting Department of State messages on the celebration of Passover, Easter, and Eid al-Fitr on embassy social media platforms.

On November 15, 2021, in accordance with the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998, as amended, the Secretary of State designated Russia a Country of Particular Concern for engaging in and tolerating systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations of religious freedom and identified the following sanction that accompanied the designation: the existing ongoing sanctions issued for individuals identified pursuant to section 404(a)(2) of the Russia and Moldova Jackson-Vanik Repeal and Sergei Magnitsky Rule of Law Accountability Act of 2012 and section 11 of the Support for the Sovereignty, Integrity, Democracy, and Economic Stability of Ukraine Act of 2014, as amended by Section 228 of the Countering

America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act, pursuant to section 402(c)(5) of the Act.