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## **RUSSIA**

### **Religious Persecution 2008**

#### **10 January 2008**

The Volga Region's Federal Arbitration Court granted the Old Believers' appeal against the annulment of the state's original decision to allot them land for the church (May 2006). The case is due to be reheard at Samara Regional Arbitration Court within the next few months. The Old Believer community concerned belongs to the Moscow-based Belokrinitsa concord, the largest Old Believer branch in Russia.

#### **20 January 2008**

12 FSB officers also broke up an Embassy of God Bible school graduation ceremony in the Volga city of Tolyatti, according to the church's bishop Anatoli Belonozhko. The Kiev-based charismatic church was struck due to its support for Ukraine's Orange Revolution. However, FSB representatives have denied involvement.

#### **21 January 2008**

In Morshansk in Tambov Region, Old Believers continue to fight for the return of their historical Dormition Church. Transferred to the community by the town authorities in October 2002, it was withdrawn again just two weeks later at the request of residents of an adjacent building, the former priest's house.

#### **31 January 2008**

After complaints from the Orthodox Church, a local police officer visited the Smolensk United Methodist Church and took copies of all its official documentation. Smolensk Regional Public Prosecutor's Office explains that its check-up is in response to an appeal from Bishop Ignati of Vyazma, headed by the second-most influential Russian Orthodox hierarch, Metropolitan Kirill.

#### **03 February 2008**

The Ukrainian founder of Moscow's Embassy of God community was turned back to Kiev from the Russian capital's Sheremetyevo Airport. Intending to lead Triumphant Zion's Sunday service, Pastor Aleksandr Dzyuba was instead told by border guards that he was barred and after one hour of detention, he was sent back to Kiev.

In continuation of the previous check up in Smolensk United Methodist Church, a female parishioner reported that the Organised Crime Police telephoned her and requested she come and testify about her membership of the church. On hearing that she could not do so due to poor health, she was read a list of the church's founding members and asked if she knew them.

#### **4 February 2008**

A check-up by the Regional Education Department followed in Smolensk United Methodist Church. Pastor Vtorov was asked about the material advertising Jung Song Pak Missionary College on his church's website and told it would require a licence; otherwise it would have to be removed.

#### **11 February 2008**

Ordinary regional police officers collected Pastor Vtorov for further questioning on the Missionary College and his church's website. Mistakenly believing the church to have members from the North Caucasus, they maintained that this check-up was linked with routine anti-terrorist measures ahead of the 2 March presidential elections.

#### **15 February 2008**

A Regional Public Prosecutor representative visited Smolensk United Methodist Church and photocopied lists of Sunday school attendees, textbooks, notebooks and other documentation. Bishop Ignati of Vyazma had written appeals to the state departments conducting the check-ups.

#### **22 February 2008**

In an investigation report presented to Pastor Vtorov, First Assistant Public Prosecutor Viktor Losev demanded the removal from Smolensk United Methodist Church's website of information about the opening on 1 September 2008 of Jung Song Pak Missionary College, including its entry conditions, study facilities and application procedure. Under the 1992 Education Law and the 1997 Religion Law, argued Losev, such an institution requires an education licence.

#### **29 February 2008**

Belgorod Regional Court dissolved a functioning Methodist congregation for failing to file a report about its annual activities on time (Article 8, Part 9). Deprived of legal personality status, the church may now only gather for worship at premises provided by its members. As local officials insist that religious communities cannot use a private home as a legal address and obstruct the use of public and commercial premises, the church will find it very difficult to regain legal personality status.

#### **24 March 2008**

Due to an unprecedented court liquidation of the Smolensk United Methodist Church because it has an unlicensed Sunday school, Smolensk Regional Court

dissolved the Church in response to a suit filed by the Regional Public Prosecutor's Office. While court liquidation means loss of legal personality status rather than a complete ban, it does bar the Methodists from maintaining or developing any form of public profile as an organisation, such as through missionary work.

#### **01 April 2008**

Fourteen members of a doomsday cult who had been holed up in a cave 750km south-east of Moscow are reported to have come out. Believing that the world will end in May, twenty eight members of this cult, called 'True Orthodox Church', barricaded themselves in the cave in October. Part of the cave is said to have collapsed, leading to fears for the life of the 14 remaining members.

#### **04 April 2008**

The leader of the Russian doomsday cult, Pyotr Kuznetsov, attempted to kill himself as his followers continue to emerge from the cave where they have been waiting for the end of the world. Officials said that he may have attempted suicide after realising his prediction had been wrong. Mr Kuznetsov has been declared to be suffering from schizophrenia and held in a psychiatric hospital for treatment.

#### **07 April 2008**

A police cordon has been removed from around two homes in central Russia where members of a sect, known as 'Heavenly Jerusalem,' have been staying since giving up their underground wait for the Apocalypse. A local government spokesman stated that the police had been withdrawn as the situation in the Nikolskoye village where the sect members are staying was calm.

#### **14 May 2008**

A criminal case was opened against Aslambek Ezhayev, the head of Moscow Islamic University's publishing department, for distributing "The Personality of a Muslim", a manual of Koran-based advice on how Muslim men should relate to themselves, their families, neighbours and society, its sole emphasis is on kindness and generosity, including towards non-Muslims.

#### **16 May 2008**

Reports of the closing of an Islamic allegedly extremist Islamic women's hospital in the republic of Dagestan with FSB involvement has been reported to Islam.ru.

#### **21 May 2008**

Asbest Public Prosecutor's Office issued two warnings on the distribution of "extremist" literature to the 80-strong local Jehovah's Witnesses community and the regional religious organization in Yekaterinburg, Sverdlovsk Region's administrative centre.

#### **23 May 2008**

Past and present pupils of Tatar-Turkish Lycess have held meetings and demonstrations against the possible closure of the schools in the Tatar capital Kazan. The closure of the schools is possible due to a government investigation

on whether the schools are teaching secret classes and disseminating literature by banned moderate Islamic theologian Said Nursi.

#### **10 June 2008**

Russia's Supreme court ruled that a Smolensk Regional Court decision on 24 March dissolving a local Methodist church was "unlawful and without foundation".

Public Prosecutor of Asbest Aleksei Almayev filed a suit at the town court charging local Jehovah's Witnesses with distribution of extremist religious literature.

#### **25 June 2008**

Russia's application of religious extremism charges continues to widen. A Moscow district public prosecutor issued an extremism warning to local Baptist pastor Petr Sautov without specifying its grounds for doing so.

#### **14 July 2008**

The court in the Urals town of Asbest chose not to consider a lawsuit accusing the Jehovah's Witnesses of distributing "extremist" religious literature, as an assessment by FSB security service specialists did not qualify as evidence.