

RUSSIA 2016 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, guaranteeing 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 lists Christianity, Islam, Judaism, and Buddhism as the country's four "traditional" religions and recognizes the special role of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC). The law distinguishes between "religious groups," which have the right to conduct worship services but may not engage in many other activities, and two categories of "religious organizations," which obtain the legal status to conduct the full range of religious and civil functions through registration with the government. Government authorities continued to detain and fine members of minority religious groups and minority religious organizations for alleged extremism. The government also fined and issued deportation orders for a number of U.S. citizens for engaging in religious activity, in particular volunteers from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormon Church). The authorities convicted and fined several individuals for "public speech offensive to religious believers." In various cities across the country authorities threatened to revoke the status of registered minority religious organizations and dissolved or disbanded a number of minority religious associations, in particular Jehovah's Witnesses communities, often on grounds they were conducting extremist activity. In the first cases under the Yarovaya Package, a new set of legal provisions officially directed against terrorism and extremism, but including measures against religious proselytizing and other activities, the government prosecuted individuals of various Protestant denominations, a bishop from the Ukrainian Reformed Orthodox Church, and a member of the International Society of Krishna Consciousness. According to representatives of religious minorities and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), the Yarovaya legislation's broad definition of missionary activity meant authorities could prosecute individuals for disseminating religious materials or preaching in addition to proselytizing. Compared to previous years, the Jewish community reported fewer government restrictions on religious activities. Police conducted raids on the private homes and places of worship of religious minorities, confiscating religious publications and property and blocking their websites. Religious minorities said local authorities used the country's anti-extremism laws to add to the list of banned religious texts. Local officials continued to prevent minority religious organizations from obtaining land, denied them construction permits for houses of worship, and, in some cases, announced plans to confiscate

or demolish places of worship. The government continued to grant privileges to the ROC not accorded to any other church or religious association, including the right to review draft legislation and greater access to public institutions.

Media and NGOs reported the killing of a deputy imam and a number of physical assaults based on religious identity. There were physical assaults on Jehovah's Witnesses, Pentecostals, Muslims, and Jews, as well as other attacks on individuals, which may have been based on both their ethnicity and religion. NGOs reported overall there were fewer instances of violence based on religious identity than in prior years. A number of events, including television programs and social media postings, aroused societal criticism because of their portrayal of the Holocaust. Acts of vandalism motivated by religious hatred continued to occur, including against Jewish, Orthodox, Buddhist, and Islamic religious sites.

The U.S. Ambassador, Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism, and embassy officers met with a range of government officials, including the foreign ministry's special representative for human rights, to discuss the treatment of religious minorities, particularly the use of the law on extremism to restrict the activities of religious minorities, and the revocation of registration of some minority religious organizations. Embassy officers raised consular cases with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs involving the discriminatory enforcement of the law against U.S. citizens who had engaged in religious activity, including preventing them from obtaining legal counsel, not allowing them to speak in their own defense at legal hearings, and not providing adequate translations into English so they could understand the nature of the proceedings against them. Consular officers attended several court hearings involving a U.S. citizen accused of violating the law on missionary activities. The Ambassador met with senior representatives of the four "traditional" religious groups, including the patriarch and the head of external relations of the ROC, the chair of the Federation of Jewish Communities, the head of the Russian Jewish Congress, the chair of the Russia Muftis Council, and the papal nuncio to discuss interfaith cooperation and ways to promote religious tolerance. Embassy officers met regularly with officials from traditional religions and from religious minorities, including ROC clergy and staff, rabbis, muftis, Protestant pastors, Catholic priests, U.S. missionaries, Mormons, Buddhists, Jehovah's Witnesses, as well as with NGOs and civil society leaders, to discuss religious legislation and government practices with regard to religious minorities.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the population at 142.4 million (July 2016 estimate). The most recent figures from a 2013 poll by the Levada Center, an NGO research organization, reports 68 percent of Russians consider themselves Orthodox, while 7 percent identify as Muslim. Religious groups constituting less than 5 percent of the population each include Buddhists, Protestants, Roman Catholics, Jews, Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, Hindus, Bahais, the International Society of Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), pagans, Tengrists, Scientologists, and Falun Gong adherents. The 2010 census estimates the number of Jews at 150,000; however, the president of the Federation of Jewish Communities of Russia stated in February 2015 the actual Jewish population is nearly one million, most of who live in Moscow and St. Petersburg. Immigrants and migrant workers from Central Asia are mostly Muslim. The majority of 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, guaranteeing the right to freedom of conscience and to freedom of religious worship, including the right to “profess, individually or jointly with others, any religion, or to profess no religion.” It guarantees the right of citizens “to freely choose, possess, and disseminate religious or other beliefs, and to act in conformity with them” and guarantees equality of rights and liberties regardless of attitude to religion. The constitution also bans any limitations of human rights on religious grounds and prohibits actions inciting religious hatred and strife. The constitution 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 contribution” of Russian Orthodox Christianity to the country's history as well as the establishment and development of the country's spirituality and culture.

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 participate or not participate in worship, other religious ceremonies, the activities of a religious association, or religious instruction.

The law states those who violate religious freedom 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 fines of up to 200,000 rubles (\$3,300) or 500,000 rubles (\$8,200), depending upon which code governs the offense.

Incitement of “religious discord” is punishable by up to four years in prison. Under the criminal code, maximum fines and prison sentences for “actions directed to incite hatred or enmity” may be punished by fines of 300,000 to 500,000 rubles (\$4,900 to \$8,200), compulsory labor for up to four years, or imprisonment for up to five years. If these actions are committed with violence, by a person with official status (a term which applies to anyone working for the government or state-owned entities, as well as people in management roles at commercial or nongovernment entities), or by a group of individuals, the punishment is 300,000 to 600,000 rubles (\$4,900 to \$9,800), compulsory labor for up to five years, or imprisonment for up to six years.

The law criminalizes offending the religious feelings of believers; actions “in public demonstrating clear disrespect for society and committed with the intent to insult the religious feelings of believers” are subject to fines of up to 300,000 rubles (\$4,900), 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 (\$8,200), compulsory labor for up to three years, or a prison sentence of up to three years.

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 extremism, including incitement to “religious discord” and “assistance to extremism,” but the law does not precisely define extremism or require an activity include an element of violence or hatred to be classified as extremism.

Being a member of a banned religious association designated as extremist is punishable by up to six years in prison for individuals and up to 12 years for persons with official status. First time offenders who willingly forsake their membership in banned religious organizations are exempt from criminal liability if they committed no other crimes.

Local laws in the regions of Kabardino-Balkaria and Dagestan ban “extremist Islamic Wahhabism.”

The law creates three categories of religious associations with different levels of legal status and privileges: groups, local organizations, and centralized organizations. 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 public security.

The “religious group” is the most basic unit and does not require state registration; however, when a group first starts its activities, it must notify authorities in the “location of the religious group activity,” typically the regional Ministry of Justice (MOJ) office. A religious group has the right to conduct worship services and rituals (but the law does not specify where or how) and to teach religion to its members. 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. Individual members of a group may invite foreigners as personal guests to engage in religious instruction, and may import religious material. According to the law, a religious group may use property bought for the group’s use by its members, or residential property owned or rented by its members, or public spaces rented by its members, to hold services.

A “local religious organization” (LRO) may register if it has at least 10 citizen members who are 18 or older and are permanent local residents. Since amendments to the law in 2015, there is no longer a duration of residency requirement, previously set at 15 years by the law, for LROs 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.

“Centralized religious organizations” (CRO) may register with the MOJ at the regional or federal level by combining at least three LROs of the same denomination. In addition to having the same legal rights as LROs, centralized organizations also have the right to open new LROs without a waiting period.

Registration of an LRO or CRO requires an association provide the following: a list of the organization’s founders and governing body, with addresses and passport information; the organization’s charter; the minutes of the founding meeting; certification from the central religious organization (in the case of LROs); a

description of the organization's doctrine, practices, history, and attitudes towards family, marriage, and education; the organization's legal address; a certificate of payment of government dues; and a charter or registration papers of the governing body in the case of organizations whose main offices are located abroad. The law imposes reporting requirements on centralized organizations and LROs receiving funding from abroad. Organizations are required to report an account of their activities, a list of leaders, the source of foreign funding, and plans for how the organization intends to use any funds or property obtained through foreign funding. Reports are annual by default, but the MOJ may require additional ad hoc reports.

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. Foreign religious organizations able to obtain the required number of local adherents may register as local religious organizations.

The government (the MOJ or the Prosecutor General's Office) oversees a religious association's compliance with the law and may review its financial and registration-related documents when conducting an inspection or investigation. The government may send representatives (with advance notice) 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 an association's 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 which do not comply with reporting or other legal requirements.

The law allows the government to limit the places in which 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, lands, and facilities 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 Ministry of Defense chaplaincy 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 not enlisted or commissioned, but are classified as assistants to the commander. Chaplains are full-time employees of the Ministry of Defense, paid out of the defense budget. The program allows for chaplains from the four traditional religions only, and calls for at least 250 chaplains.

The Yarovaya Package, passed in July, amends the earlier Federal Law on the Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations with regard to missionary activity, which the law defines 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 amended law, in order 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 authorizing the individual to share beliefs from a religious group or registered organization. This letter must be provided to the authorities and the individual must carry a copy of it. The law explicitly bans any beliefs from being shared in residential buildings without such documentation (unless in the form of a religious service, rite, and ceremony), or on another organization's property without permission from that organization. Materials disseminated by missionaries must be marked with the name of the religious association providing the authorization.

Engaging in missionary activity prohibited by the amended law carries a fine of 5,000 to 50,000 rubles (\$80 to \$820) for individuals and 100,000 to 1,000,000 rubles (\$1,640 to \$16,400) for legal entities (which includes both LROs and CROs). Foreign citizens or stateless persons who violate restrictions on missionary activities may be fined 30,000 to 50,000 (\$490 to \$820) rubles and are subject to administrative deportation.

In April, prior to the passage of the Yarovaya Package, the Yamal regional government imposed restrictions on missionary activity, joining several other regional governments which passed similar restrictions on missionary activity within their territories in prior years.

Republics in the North Caucasus have varying policies on wearing the hijab in public schools. Hijabs are banned in public schools in Stavropol, while in Chechnya the law requires women to wear a hijab in all public spaces and buildings.

The law does not provide precise criteria on how written religious materials may be classified as extremist. 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 experts also may review religious materials for extremism.

Prosecutors may take material to a court and ask the court to declare it extremist, but materials introduced in court during the consideration of administrative, civil, or criminal cases may also be declared extremist *sua sponte* (i.e., of their own accord). 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 listed on the federal list of extremist materials. There is no legal procedure for removal from the list even if a court declares an item no longer classified as extremist, but lists are reviewed and re-issued on a regular basis and publications may be dropped from lists. The law makes it illegal to declare the key texts, or "holy books" of the four traditional religions to be 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 (\$16 to \$49), or 2,000 to 5,000 rubles (\$33 to \$82) for public officials, as well as the 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 (\$1,640 to \$16,400). Individuals who produce materials later deemed extremist are not to be punished retroactively but must cease production and distribution of those materials.

The law allows the transfer of 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 state property indefinitely. Amendments to the law enacted during the year prohibit the transfer of living quarters for religious use. Those amendments also prohibit the use of living quarters for missionary activity unless the activity is a part of a “religious service, rite, or ceremony.”

Religious education or civil ethics classes are compulsory in all secondary schools, public and private. 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. Amendments to the law, enacted in July 2015 based on a 2009 ruling of the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) in a case brought by the Jehovah’s Witnesses, cancel the requirement for representatives of religious organizations to be licensed to conduct religious education activities in Sunday schools and home schooling. 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 dealing with religious freedom. The ombudsman may intercede on behalf of those who submit complaints, but may not compel other government bodies to act, and may not directly intervene in complaints not addressed to the government.

The law entitles individuals and organizations to take religious freedom cases to the ECHR in Strasbourg. 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 as far as possible. Legislation enacted in December 2015 allows the Constitutional Court to determine whether judgments by international and regional courts, including the ECHR, are consistent with the constitution.

There is compulsory military service for men, 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 an 80,000 ruble (\$1,300) fine to six months in prison.

By law religious associations may not participate in political campaigns or the activity of political parties or movements, or provide material or other aid to

political groups. This restriction applies to religious associations and not to their individual members.

The ROC and all members of the Public Chamber (a state institution made up of representatives of public associations) are granted the opportunity to review draft legislation pending before the State Duma on a case-by-case basis. No formal mechanism exists for permanent representation of religious organizations in the Public Chamber. Individuals may be invited into the Public Chamber from both traditional religions and minority denominations.

The law states foreigners or stateless individuals whose presence in the country is deemed “undesirable” are forbidden to become 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 government’s nonimmigrant visa rules allow foreign religious workers to spend no more than 90 of every 180 days in the country. The Yarovaya Package introduced changes to the type of visa for those coming to the country to perform missionary activity, requiring foreign nationals entering the country for the purpose of making religious contacts or performing professional religious activity to have a contract with a religious organization.

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

Government authorities continued to detain and fine members of minority religious groups and organizations for alleged extremism. The government also fined and deported a number of U.S. citizens it called “missionaries,” in particular volunteers from the Mormon Church. The authorities convicted and fined several individuals for public speech offensive to religious believers. In various cities across the country authorities dissolved or disbanded a number of minority religious associations, in particular Jehovah’s Witnesses communities, often on grounds they were conducting “extremist” activity. In the first cases under the Yarovaya

Package, the government prosecuted individuals of various Protestant denominations, a bishop from the Ukrainian Reformed Orthodox Church, and several ISKON members. According to representatives of religious minorities and NGOs, the Yarovaya legislation's broad definition of missionary activity meant authorities could prosecute individuals for disseminating religious materials or preaching in addition to proselytizing. Compared to previous years, the Jewish community reported fewer government restrictions on religious activities. Police conducted raids on the private homes and places of worship of religious minorities, disrupting religious services and confiscating religious publications they deemed extremist. Religious minorities said local authorities used the country's anti-extremism laws to add to the list of banned religious texts. Local officials continued to prevent minority religious organizations from obtaining land, denied them construction permits for houses of worship and, in some cases, announced plans to confiscate or demolish places of worship. The government continued to grant privileges to the ROC accorded to no other church or religious association, including greater access to public institutions such as schools, hospitals, prisons, police, and the military forces.

In March the Rostov Regional Court upheld the decision of the Taganrog City Court which had convicted 16 Jehovah's Witnesses of "extremism" in 2015. The 16 had been arrested on a charge of "inciting religious hatred" through "propagating the exclusivity and supremacy of their religion" by continuing to pray and read the Bible after their community in Taganrog was banned as extremist in 2009. The Taganrog court had sentenced them to suspended prison terms and fines. The Jehovah's Witnesses reported the initial fines ranged from 20,000-70,000 rubles (\$330-\$1,100). The Rostov court lowered the fines for 12 of the 16 defendants to 10,000 rubles (\$160) but left fines unchanged for four of the defendants who had been convicted of "organizing the activity of an extremist organization."

According to the international NGO Forum 18, authorities in four regions of the country pursued separate cases against a total of 11 Muslims arrested between December 2015 and March 2016 on extremism charges for reading the works of the Turkish theologian Said Nursi. Five of those charged were held in pretrial detention, three faced travel bans, and one was released on bail, while the whereabouts of another remained unknown and the eleventh reportedly had left the country. Forum 18 reported one of the five prisoners in pretrial detention was prohibited from praying in prison. Another was placed in solitary confinement for six months without the right to correspondence. Another, Komil Odilov, had already served a one-year suspended sentence for alleged extremist activity and

was appealing his prior conviction to the ECHR in Strasbourg. All the defendants were prosecuted under provisions of the law prohibiting participation in banned organizations. In a separate case, in May Forum 18 reported a twelfth Muslim who had posted Nursi's writings on social media in 2012 and 2013 received a two-year suspended sentence from a Chelyabinsk court. In September Forum 18 reported six cases from earlier years against Muslims on charges of being Nursi readers had reached the two-year cutoff point for criminal prosecution and had been terminated, although the NGO stated the defendants could be prosecuted again for an identical crime.

In April the local human rights NGO Memorial reported Magomed Nabi Magomedov, an imam in Khasavyurt, Dagestan, was arrested and charged with making statements in a sermon justifying terrorism and "intended to arouse hatred, debasing the dignity of an individual or a group of people in relation to their religion or belonging to a social group." Magomedov reportedly was severely beaten and denied access to his lawyer for several days. According to Memorial, Magomedov's sermon had criticized government authorities for attempting to close mosques, but did not justify terrorism.

The website *ura.ru*, a news and information agency focusing on the Ural area, reported the Federal Security Service (FSB) arrested seven Jabhat al-Nusrah members in Yekaterinburg on February 8 on suspicion of planning terrorist attacks in Moscow, St. Petersburg, and Yekaterinburg. The FSB then searched a mosque in Yekaterinburg for evidence connecting the mosque to the arrestees and, according to the mosque's Imam Airat Mukhametzyanov, confiscated 250 to 300 religious books from his office. No further information about the case was available.

On March 15, Interfax reported police had detained 14 members of the Turkish religious organization Nurjular, an organization banned by the government, in a number of cities across Dagestan. Nurjular's Russian leader Ziyavdin Dapayev was among those arrested. Dapayev and Artur Kultuyev were charged with organizing activities of an extremist organization, and the remaining 12 men were released. Dapayev previously had received a suspended sentence for organizing the activity of an international extremist religious group. No further information was available on the case as of the end of the year. In the course of the operation in the cities of Makhachkala, Izberbash and Khasavyurt, authorities reportedly seized more than 400 "extremist" books and brochures, a number of laptop computers, cell phones, flash memory cards, and CDs.

In April police detained approximately 200 mosque-goers in Makhachkala, capital of Dagestan, according to the website *Kavkazskaya Politika* and the newspaper *Novoe Delo*. The men were subsequently released. A local cleric witnessing the incident reported the detentions appeared to target individuals only because they were trying to go to the mosque. He said authorities told the mosque-goers they would be arrested again if they tried to return. Subsequently, the press service of the Dagestani Interior Ministry said it had no further information about the incident.

Memorial also reported instances of authorities in Dagestan conducting raids and document checks at Salafi mosques.

On September 6, the FSB raided the headquarters of the Russian Orthodox Autonomous Church (ROAC), a Church independent from the ROC, in Suzdal, detained and questioned two clergy members before releasing them, and confiscated ROAC property and literature. The reported reason for the FSB raid was suspicion of extremism.

In March media reported masked security service personnel checked the documents of 540 worshipers at a mosque in Saransk, saying they were trying to identify extremists. Fifteen worshipers were taken to a police station for questioning, and one was subsequently deported for being in the country illegally. No further information was available about the case.

In April authorities in Moscow and St. Petersburg detained 30 people they reportedly suspected of involvement in the activities of the banned group Aum Shinriko. After police questioned the individuals, the police determined the individuals were practicing yoga and released them.

There were reports government authorities utilized laws to punish people for public speech offensive to religious believers, although the SOVA Center, an NGO providing information on human rights issues, stated prosecutions under the law were relatively rare.

On February 24, the Kirovsky District Court in Yekaterinburg fined a former teacher at the Jewish Or Avner School, Semyon Tykman, 200,000 rubles (\$3,300) for “humiliating the religious dignity” of other faiths. According to press reports on the case, from 2013 to 2014 Tykman allegedly told his students Judaism was superior to other faiths, and stated all Germans should be killed for their actions against Jews during the Second World War. Tykman appealed the verdict, which

he stated was based on false evidence provided by disgruntled students and their parents. The appeals court upheld the original ruling on June 10, but Tykman avoided paying the fine due to the expiration of the charges under the statute of limitations.

The newspaper *Kommersant* reported the Kurgan branch of the government's Investigative Committee had opened a criminal case in January against Ali Yakupov, Imam of the Kurgan Mosque on suspicion of instigating hatred and humiliation of human dignity for a social media posting he allegedly made saying God would punish government officials for banning the hijab in China. The newspaper reported Yakupov's posting was deemed to be "extremist." News.ru reported police seized several computers, flash drives, and banned books from the mosque. Yakupov was charged with inciting hatred or hostility through the use of his official position; his trial began in December.

In March atheist blogger Viktor Krasnov was charged with offending the feelings of believers for comments he posted on a website in 2014 describing the Bible as a "collection of Jewish fairytales" and denying the existence of God. According to RIA Novosti, a hearing for his case scheduled for January 2017 was postponed until later in 2017.

Gazeta.ru reported a blogger from Yekaterinburg, Ruslan Sokolovsky, had received a two-month prison sentence in September for "inciting enmity and hatred" and "offending the feelings of believers" by playing the game *Pokemon Go* in an Orthodox church and posting antireligious videos online. *Ura.ru* reported Sokolovsky was placed under house arrest after his detention, but then detained again in October for violating the terms of his house arrest.

In November media and NGOs reported authorities had charged two individuals with "offending the feelings of religious believers" out of 13 detained after protesting the construction of an Orthodox church at Moscow's Torfyanka Park. The 11 other protesters were released. The park had been the site of clashes between local residents, who said they wanted to preserve the park, and ROC activists, who supported the construction of the church, since 2015. ROC Patriarch Kirill was quoted in the media as calling the opponents of the church construction "cultists" and "pagans." According to the NGO Human Rights Watch, pro-Kremlin media labelled the protesters "neopagans" and claimed the police had found "ammunition and psychotropic drugs" when they raided the apartments of the protesters. There was no additional information available on the case as of the end of the year.

Anton Paleev, head of the Moscow State Duma Commission on Affairs of Public Associations and Religious Organizations, stated the activity of what he called “sects” had grown by 30 percent due to the economic crisis, citing increased complaints to Ministry of the Interior (MVD) security personnel in the city. In November Paleev called for an official register of sects, but said the city duma could not pursue additional legislation against sects until a definition of a sect was established at the federal level.

In February a group of federal duma deputies called the Group for Protection of Christian Values stated it was “urgent” to combat what it termed sectarianism in the country by stopping the spread of “sects.” A spokesperson for the group said it would focus on developing a definition for the term “sect” which was required to pass legislation restricting their activities. One member of the group alleged religious sects had played a role in the revolution against the Yanukovich government in Ukraine and accused sects of suppressing the Orthodox religion in Ukraine. In November the deputy head of the Federation Council's Committee on Constitutional Legislation and State Development, Yelena Mizulina, called for legislation to combat what she said were “500 destructive sects” operating in the country.

Media, NGOs, and religious minorities reported continued attempts by the authorities to dissolve minority religious associations, often on the grounds they were conducting extremist activity.

On March 2, the prosecutor general's office issued an official warning to the Administrative Center of Jehovah's Witnesses in the country, located in St Petersburg, stating engaging in “extremist activity” was not permitted and alleging LROs affiliated with the administrative center were engaging in such activity. Representatives of the Jehovah's Witnesses expressed concern their St. Petersburg administrative center could be legally and financially disbanded if the prosecutor general's warning was upheld in court and the prosecutor general determined additional “extremist activity” had occurred in the 12 months following the warning. The Jehovah's Witnesses representatives said this could in turn provide the basis for the disbanding of the Jehovah's Witnesses' 406 LROs and 2,500 groups around the country. The Tverskoy District Court in Moscow upheld the warning on October 12, although an appeal was scheduled to be heard by the Russian Supreme Court in January 2017.

Authorities continued to disband Jehovah's Witnesses communities across the country. In addition to communities in Taganrog, Samara, and Abinsk, which had been ruled extremist and dissolved in previous years, authorities disbanded Jehovah's Witnesses communities in Belogorod, Stary Oskol, Elista, and Orel for extremism. Regional governing bodies in Arkhangelsk in June and in Sakhalin in September called for a nationwide ban on Jehovah's Witnesses. The Jehovah's Witnesses appealed a decision to dissolve their community in Birobidzhan to the Supreme Court, with a court hearing scheduled for February 2017.

In April the Supreme Court overturned the decision of the Tyumen Regional Court banning the local Jehovah's Witnesses religious organization due to extremist activities. The court accepted assertions by the Jehovah's Witnesses about local police planting extremist materials in their facilities and fabricating affidavits from Jehovah's Witnesses members acknowledging they possessed extremist materials. The Supreme Court's decision allowed the Jehovah's Witnesses organization in Tyumen to resume its activities.

In June the Supreme Court denied the appeal of the Church of Scientology of Moscow against a decision by a Moscow city court banning the group's activities in the city on the grounds the group did not qualify as a religious organization according to the law because the term Scientology was a registered trademark in the United States. The use of the registered trademark, according to the court, meant the Church of Scientology of Moscow was acting in the city as a commercial partnership rather than a religious organization. According to media accounts, in June police raided several Scientology Church facilities in Moscow and St. Petersburg on suspicion of involvement in money laundering. In March the media reported police raided Scientology facilities in Tatarstan on suspicion of violating provisions of the law related to the privacy of personal information.

In September authorities in Cherepovets dissolved the local Jewish organization for what they said was a failure to meet reporting requirements associated with its registration. A spokesperson for the Federation of Jewish Communities stated the decision was administrative in nature; he stated the Cherepovets community's activity had declined significantly in recent years. The community, however, reported receiving anonymous threats prior to being dissolved and was subject to negative comments from local officials. The dissolution of the community was praised in online postings by what media observers said were right-wing activists. The posts stated the authorities should dissolve Jewish communities elsewhere in the country as well.

In July the Regional Court in Samara banned the activity of the Mosque of Mirmamed prayer group. The group appealed the decision to the Supreme Court in September. In February the Chabaevsk City Court had found the group's imam guilty of distributing extremist materials for posting the film "Miracles of the Quran" (which links modern scientific phenomena to verses in the Quran) on the social network VKontakte and had fined him 3,000 rubles (\$49). The Nefteyugansk City Court had previously ruled the film was extremist in 2011, although the SOVA Center considered the ruling to be "without merit." As of the end of the year, there was no information available on the Supreme Court's consideration of the case.

According to the MOJ, the government approved 1,335 new registrations of religious organizations in 2015, most of which were ROC-affiliated. The MOJ did not publish updated figures for 2016.

Unlike previous years, the government did not designate any religious groups or organizations as "foreign agents." The government did add the SOVA Center, an NGO dedicated by its own account to reporting on religious freedom abuses and restrictions as well as on other human rights issues, to the list of designated foreign agents. On December 13, the authorities suspended the "foreign agent" designation of the Jewish Cultural Center "Hesed-Teshuva" ("Kindness/Repentance") in Ryazan, which had been so designated since September 2015.

Compared with previous years, the Jewish community reported fewer government restrictions on religious activities.

Leaders of a number of Protestant churches said their communities were hindered by the government's unwillingness to approve some of their applications for official recognition, by church closings and dissolutions, and by excessive taxes.

In two separate incidents in Moscow in June and July, the SOVA Center reported Muslim women were prevented from entering buildings at two universities for wearing headscarves.

The first cases pursued by the authorities under the Yarovaya Package appeared shortly after the amendments came into force on July 20 and involved approximately 30 individuals, including foreign citizens, and three organizations: the Administrative Center of the New Apostolic Church, a Jehovah's Witness community, and a Pentecostal church. According to Forum 18, between July and

the end of December the government prosecuted two Baptists, five Pentecostals, two Seventh Day Adventists, five other Protestants, a bishop from the Ukrainian Reformed Orthodox Church, one Buddhist, five Jehovah's Witnesses, and six members of ISKON. The individuals reportedly were prosecuted for activities such as holding a rap concert for youth, handing out New Testaments on a train, and holding conversations in an apartment building. The arrests resulted in 22 trials, according to Forum 18, with 17 convictions and five acquittals. Those convicted were fined from 5,000 to 50,000 rubles (\$82 to \$820). The defendants appealed nine out of 17 convictions. Four were unsuccessful; in one case the verdict was overturned and the case sent back for re-examination. The other four appeals had not been heard as of the end of the year.

According to representatives of minority religious associations and NGOs, the Yarovaya legislation, which had been enacted for the ostensible purpose of enhancing the country's antiterrorism capability, gave the authorities a range of new powers to limit civil society. They said the broad definition of "missionary activity" in the legislation meant it included not only proselytizing, but also disseminating religious materials, preaching, and engaging in an interfaith discussion about religion, including in private residences without prior authorization. According to the media and NGOs, there were widespread protests against the legislation, including an August 9 demonstration of 2,000 people in Moscow's Sokolniki Park. An online petition sponsored by the Russian Public Initiative reportedly gained more than the 100,000 signatures. Religious leaders, such as Albir Krganov, the Mufti of Moscow, the Central Region of Russia and Chuvashia, called the legislation unjustified. Krganov stated he did not know how the law could be enforced given the custom of Muslim leaders to visit the homes of adherents without specific authorization.

Regional governments also passed restrictions on missionary activity, with officials often citing concerns about missionaries as sources of foreign influence.

On August 14, an independent Baptist preacher and U.S. citizen who had lived in Oryol since 2005 was brought before the city's Railway District Court for allegedly holding religious services in his own home and advertising them on the bulletin boards of nearby housing blocks. The preacher described the incident to the press and on his website, saying he was denied access to his lawyer and fined 40,000 rubles (\$660). Against the advice of a court-appointed attorney, who reportedly advised the preacher he and his family might be in danger if they remained in the country, the preacher appealed his case. The appeal was denied, but according to his website, the preacher filed an appeal with the Supreme Court

in November after paying the fine. The Supreme Court had not ruled on the appeal as of the end of the year.

Media reported yoga teacher Dmitry Ugay was detained in October and charged with illegal missionary activity under the Yarovaya legislation for giving a talk about the philosophy behind yoga at a festival in St. Petersburg. The decision to charge him attracted criticism in the press and on social media. Comments by the authorities suggested they might drop the charges after the turn of the year.

Media reported authorities in Samara had detained a 72-year-old U.S. pastor in July and held him for eight hours without legal representation or access to his medication. His arrest was filmed and later broadcast by the state-controlled channel NTV, which reported allegations he was not a legitimate pastor and had allegedly come to the country to perform same-sex marriages. According to the international media, the pastor acknowledged contacts with the country's LGBT community, but stated he had no intention of performing same-sex marriages. The pastor was taken to court the same day on which he was detained, where a judge ruled he had violated the terms of his visa, fined him, and ordered him to leave the country within five days. He complied with the order to leave the country.

On August 5, according to representatives of the Mormon Church in Moscow, police in Samara detained six of their U.S. volunteers, held them in custody for more than eight hours without food or access to legal representation, and then brought them before a judge, who ordered them deported. According to Church officials, police charged the volunteers with failing to register at their apartments. They had been registered at the address of their sponsoring religious organization instead, which Church officials said was in accordance with official guidance given to the Church by the MOJ. The judge and prosecutors reportedly attempted to get the six to sign statements admitting guilt. Four of the volunteers signed the admission statements and two refused. The Mormon Church said they transferred four of the volunteers to other countries and one returned to the United States following the deportation order.

Religious minorities said local authorities used the country's anti-extremism laws to ban sacred religious texts. The MOJ's list of extremist materials grew to 4,015 entries at the end of the year from 3,209 at the end of 2015.

In January the Constitutional Court upheld a ban on *jw.org*, the official website of the Jehovah's Witnesses. The MOJ had added the website to the federal list of extremist materials in 2015. Internet providers throughout the country blocked

access to the website, and it became a criminal offense to promote it from within the country.

The Jehovah Witnesses' brochure "How Life Appeared" was designated extremist by the Sverdlovsk regional court on August 22.

In February the St. Petersburg and Leningrad Region Court of Arbitration dismissed a complaint filed in January by the Jehovah's Witnesses against Vyborg customs officials in connection with the 2015 seizure of a shipment of Bibles and other religious material. The decision left the books and materials in the hands of customs authorities. In March the local Vyborg court began hearings on a case initiated by the Vyborg prosecutor to declare the Jehovah's Witnesses version of the Bible to be "extremist." Although the Vyborg court initially decided in favor of the prosecution, the Leningrad Regional Court overturned the finding in October and returned the case to the lower court for reexamination, where the case remained as of the end of the year.

In December media reported a court in Vladivostok had issued a 30,000 ruble (\$490) fine, in accordance with the specifications of the Yarovaya legislation related to missionary activity, to the Salvation Army Christian organization for incorrectly marking 40 Bibles the organization planned to distribute. The court ordered that the Bibles in question be destroyed, despite the Salvation Army lawyer's assertion the law allowed the authorities only to confiscate property, but not to destroy it. The ROC expressed concern over the decision to destroy the Bibles, which it called a major "overreach."

The SOVA Center reported the government added a book by a Salafi theologian from Saudi Arabia to the list of extremist materials in May. The Almet'yevsk city court in Tatarstan ruled the book "Comments to the Three Foundations" was extremist.

The press, NGOs, and religious groups reported government authorities across the country continued to raid the private homes and places of worship of minority religious associations, confiscating and destroying religious literature and other property. According to *Portal-Credo.ru*, a website devoted to religion in Russia, the tactic of the police planting prohibited materials at the homes and worship places of minority religious associations had become a widespread phenomenon.

Authorities in Vladivostok searched the offices and a meetinghouse of the Mormon Church in September during an unannounced inspection and claimed to have found

child pornography on the premises, according to Church representatives. Authorities then confiscated computers and other materials. The Mormon Church denied the allegations and said authorities had planted the materials. The local investigative committee found no crime had occurred, and the confiscated computers and hard drives were returned.

In March Jehovah's Witnesses in Prokhladinyi said FSB and MVD forces raided one of their worship services and "discovered" banned extremist materials. The Jehovah's Witnesses said they conducted regular searches of their own building to confirm the absence of prohibited materials and had no doubt the materials in question had been planted by the authorities. Similar incidents reportedly occurred against Jehovah's Witnesses in St. Petersburg in October (in which, according to Jehovah's Witnesses, authorities detained 14 people for questioning and tampered with security cameras), as well as in Birobidzhan, Stavropol, Karachayevo-Cherkessia, Kostomuksha, Voronezh, Petrozavodsk, and other locations. The Jehovah's Witnesses reported 30 cases of police raids on Kingdom Halls and other meeting places between January and August, the most recent period for which data was available.

There were reports local officials continued to prevent minority religious organizations from obtaining land and denied them construction permits for houses of worship. In some cases, authorities reportedly announced plans to confiscate places of worship or demolish them

As in past years, Muslim leaders stated Moscow's four mosques were inadequate for the city's Muslim population. Even with the opening of the 10,000-person Moscow Cathedral Mosque in 2015, the Muslim leaders said, the number of Muslims in the city – which Muslim leaders estimated to be two million – greatly exceeded the capacity of the city's mosques. In December media reported Mufti Albir Krganov had announced his intention to build a new mosque in Moscow with a capacity of 1,000 worshipers. In past years, Moscow Mayor Sergey Sobyenin opposed issuing permits for construction of new mosques, saying many Muscovites opposed them and they were largely attended by migrants who did not have residence permits in the city.

The SOVA Center reported in September authorities denied the transfer of a former mosque in Stavropol back to the Muslim community. The building continued to be used by the Stavropol State Historical-Cultural and National-Geographic Museum-Reserve.

The online news site *Caucasian Knot* reported authorities in Khasavyurt, Dagestan, had closed the Severnaya Mosque and welded its entrance shut in January. Authorities reportedly said the mosque had been built on property allocated for residential construction. Maksim Shevchenko, a member of the Human Rights Council (a consultative body established under the President of the Russian Federation), said closing the mosque without consulting parishioners constituted a provocation and undermined the authority of the Dagestan mufti's office. The mosque was later reopened following street protests by parishioners and negotiations with local authorities.

In June the SOVA center reported a Moscow Court decision to demolish a church belonging to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church-Kyiv Patriarchate (UOC-KP). The church had reportedly been the target of a campaign by members of the public and local media following disagreements in Ukraine between the UOC-KP and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church-Moscow Patriarchate. The decision was upheld in October after the UOC-KP appealed.

The ROC continued to report difficulty reclaiming former properties confiscated in the Soviet era.

The Newspaper *Kommersant* reported the former Director of the Museum of the Arctic and Antarctic, Viktor Boyarskiy, said his opposition to transferring the building housing the museum back to the ROC had led to the decision by the Federal Hydrometeorology and Environmental Monitoring Service not to extend his contract in February.

Media reported in January authorities in the Omsk region refused a request by the ROC to restore to the ROC ownership of the Isilskulskoy Diocese cathedral building along with an adjacent site. The authorities said the land requested was too large given the size of the building in question.

Media in Pskov reported employees of the Starocheskassk Historical and Architectural Museum in December successfully sued to prevent the transfer of the Ataman Palace building housing the museum back to the ROC.

On February 25, Sergey Nabokikh, the Mayor of Kachkanar, Sverdlovsk Oblast, stated a local Buddhist monastery had to move to a new location approximately two miles from its existing site on top of Kachkanar Mountain (in the Ural Mountains approximately 125 miles north of Yekaterinburg) by autumn. His statement followed an announcement by the Sverdlovsk Bailiff's Office the

monastery would be torn down because it had been built in 1995 without construction permits. In 2010, the Kachkanar Mining and Processing Enterprise obtained a license to develop an iron ore deposit located on the same site as the monastery; the company joined with the city government in promising to help the Buddhists relocate the monastery to Mokhnatka Mountain. The bailiff's office had originally announced the monastery would be torn down by March 1; the mayor's statement pushed the deadline to November, but according to subsequent media reports the scheduled demolition date was pushed back further to March 1, 2017.

According to TASS, although no public announcement was made immediately, on December 30, the governor of St. Petersburg reached agreement with the ROC Diocese of St Petersburg and Ladoga to transfer St. Isaac's Cathedral (currently a museum) to the Church's administration. The St. Petersburg government had previously opposed the transfer, citing public opposition and the city's inability to finance maintenance of the historic building without income from admission fees. ROC officials had appealed the St Petersburg government's rejection of the transfer in various venues, including an appeal to the prime minister, according to one media account. Reportedly as part of the agreement, a public announcement of the transfer would be made in early 2017.

In November the Smolensk regional government announced its intention to "repurpose" the Roman Catholic Church of the Immaculate Conception in Smolensk as a concert hall. According to Forum 18, the authorities denied the requests of the local Catholic parish, made over many years, to regain use of the church on the grounds the archival report on the building did not indicate the religious purpose of the property.

In January the Oryol regional government legally transferred ownership of the city's former synagogue to the city's Jewish community after agreement was reached allowing the technical college housed in the building to remain there until it moved to new quarters in 2018.

According to minority religious associations and NGOs, the government continued to cooperate more closely with the ROC than with other religious organizations. Although neither the constitution nor the law explicitly accorded privileges or advantages to the ROC, they said, the ROC continued to benefit from a number of formal and informal agreements with government ministries, giving it greater access than other religious organizations to public institutions such as schools, hospitals, prisons, the police, and the military forces. The government also continued to provide the ROC patriarch with security guards and access to official

vehicles, a privilege accorded no other religious organization. In addition, media reported the ROC continued to benefit from a large number of government grants totaling hundreds of millions of rubles (millions of dollars) over recent years. A representative from the ROC privately stated the ROC had the most robust network of institutions capable of utilizing grants, and the administrative burden associated with applying for such grants meant smaller religious organizations were less inclined to apply for them.

The Chairman of the ROC's Department for Relations of the Church with Society and News Media, Vladimir Legoida, in an interview in January with the newspaper *Sankt Peterburgskie Vedomosti*, stated the government did not interfere in the internal affairs of the ROC, but it did provide support in the form of what he termed "opportunities to study Orthodox culture" in schools alongside other traditional religions, as well as government assistance in restoring ROC buildings.

According to the national edition of the newspaper *Vedomosti*, Seventh-day Adventists Vladimir and Dmitry Salnikov filed a complaint with the ECHR in April after the government rejected their plea for alternative civil service and drafted them into the armed forces for obligatory military service. According to a representative of the Salnikovs, this was the first complaint to the ECHR regarding obligatory military service from Russian citizens. There was no report of any action taken by the ECHR as of the end of the year.

According to a report by Memorial, Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov in February retracted an order requiring every Chechen citizen between 14 and 35 to undergo "spiritual and moral passportization," after which they would receive a document from the police and local branch of the muftiyat stating their personal details, including religious denomination, nationality, and family. Kadyrov originally had stated he was issuing the order as part of the effort to combat terrorism and extremism.

Human rights activists and opposition party members criticized as anti-Semitic comments made by Foreign Ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova during a November 17 appearance on the TV broadcast *Sunday News*. Zakharova had suggested the Jewish community in the United States secretly pulled the levers of power and had been instrumental in deciding the outcome of the U.S. presidential election.

In April Interfax reported Vladislav Vikhorev, a candidate for the United Russia Party, made anti-Semitic statements during a primary debate in Chelyabinsk.

Chief Rabbi Berel Lazar wrote to Prime Minister Dmitri Medvedev condemning the outburst and criticizing the party for not taking a firmer stance against Vikhorev.

Rabbi Alexander Boroda, President of the Federation of Jewish Communities of Russia, publicly criticized the state-funded television channel RT for airing what he said was an anti-Semitic report on June 27 detailing Palestinian allegations an Israeli rabbi had approved the poisoning of Palestinian wells.

The Slavic Center for Law and Justice reported two U.S. tourists were fined 3,000 rubles (\$49) each for violating the terms of their visas when they attended services and an event at a Pentecostal church in Kaluga. Authorities reportedly said their visas did not permit them to engage in religious activities.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Media and NGOs reported one killing and a number of physical assaults related to religious identity during the year, although according to data collected by the SOVA Center, there were fewer instances of violence based on religious identity than in prior years. SOVA recorded 21 acts of violence directed against religious groups compared to 26 such acts in 2015. SOVA also separately recorded 31 acts of violence against Central Asians, people from the Caucasus, and other “non-Slavs” during the same period compared to 39 in 2015. Because ethnicity and religion are often closely linked, it was difficult to categorize many of these incidents as being solely based on religious identity. The media also attributed some of these attacks to the political or human rights activities of the victims.

Caucasian Knot reported Ravil Kaybaliev, Deputy Imam of the mosque in Karatube in Stavropol, was killed by unknown individuals in September. According to *Caucasian Knot*, Muslim community members said the imam was under pressure from the authorities due to his human right activities.

On June 12, unidentified men attacked an employee of the social media network *Vkontakte*, breaking three fingers of the man’s fingers while calling him a traitor, a Jew, and a member of the “fifth column” (a term used by state media to describe the political opposition, according to analysts). The employee reportedly had become known for prior antigovernment internet posts.

Jehovah’s Witnesses reported 13 cases of physical assault and eight attacks on Kingdom Halls between January and August. In March a man with a dog

threatened to set the animal loose on attendees during a religious service in a Kingdom Hall in St. Petersburg. He attacked one individual, shouted insults, and damaged the building. The same month in Moscow, a man threatened two Jehovah's Witnesses with a knife, injuring one of them. Jehovah's Witnesses found a homemade bomb with a canister of poisonous gas attached to a Kingdom Hall's ventilation system in Artem in August. The bomb, which was accompanied by a threatening note, was disposed of by authorities. In March activists from the right wing Lev Protiv movement in Kirov threatened to take vigilante action if prosecutors failed to act against Jehovah's Witnesses.

Violent incidents targeting religious figures and buildings occurred in Ingushetia. Memorial reported four people were injured in a car bombing near the Nasir-Kort mosque in March. Unknown men threw a grenade into the courtyard of the home of Assistant Mufti of Ingushetia Magomed Shashtyrov, but no one was hurt.

The Slavic Center for Law and Justice reported two armed men broke into a Pentecostal church in January, beat two parishioners and threatened them at knifepoint. The assailants demanded to see a list of church members, identified themselves as "native Orthodox," and promised to eradicate all "sectarians."

Media reported a man broke into the Moscow Choral Synagogue in central Moscow and wounded a security guard with an air pistol on October 1, while 150 people were in the building. The attacker entered the building and attacked the guard after being told he could not meet with the synagogue's leaders. The man was carrying a container of flammable liquid and had threatened to burn down the building. He was apprehended and brought to a psychiatric facility where he was diagnosed with schizophrenia. The incident occurred the day before the start of Rosh Hashanah. The interior ministry opened a criminal probe and investigated the incident as "hooliganism." President of the Federation of Jewish Communities of Russia Boroda criticized the authorities' decision to charge the man with hooliganism rather than a crime motivated by ethnic hatred (which is how crimes against Jews are categorized under the law), suggesting law enforcement wanted to maintain positive statistics with regard to ethnically (religiously) motivated incidents.

According to media and NGO reports, on October 7, members of the organization "Orthodox Human Rights Analytical Center" detained eight individuals at a train station in Moscow and handed them over to the police, asserting the police should charge the eight with conducting illegal missionary activity as members of the Jehovah's Witnesses. The police took two of the individuals to a police station and

charged them with illegally conducting missionary activity under the Yarovaya amendment to the law. On 7 December, the police dropped the charges against the two after the men's lawyers reportedly argued they were not associated with the Jehovah's Witnesses and police "experts" had failed to carry out the required analysis of the Bibles the two had distributed.

According to media accounts, the parades and protests held on November 4 as part of the annual "Russian March" included nationalist groups carrying banners displaying anti-Islamic messages as well as mimicking Nazi symbols.

On May 31, approximately 50 residents of Perm sent a letter to the city administration protesting the construction of a new mosque close to the central market. The protesters said the new mosque would lead to the creation of a "Muslim enclave" in downtown Perm, which they said would pose a "public threat" and create obstacles for the assimilation of migrant workers. The protesters said they had been unable to voice their opinion publicly because they were not informed of the May 30 public hearings held at the Perm District Administration concerning the mosque's construction.

According to February 20 media reports, a priest from a Ukrainian Greek Catholic church, who had been posting pictures of Ukrainian SS officers from the WWII-era Galychina Division on his web page since 2011, would go on trial in Chelyabinsk on charges of posting extremist materials on the Internet. The priest, who said he had posted the pictures because he was interested in this period of history, potentially faced fines and 15 days in prison for the public display of Nazi symbols. No further information was available about the case as of the end of the year.

Russian Writers' Union member Anton Blagin reportedly distributed copies to friends of a new book he had written denying the Holocaust and advocating the eradication of the Jewish people. He went on trial in Murmansk in March on charges of inflaming ethnic hatred and faced a jail sentence of up to two years if convicted, but the case was dropped in April due to the expiration of the statute of limitations. In a separate case, Blagin was fined 2,000 rubles (\$33) in September for displaying Nazi imagery on the internet.

In June the SOVA Center reported a series of articles published in the journal *Public Opinion* in Saratov had described as propaganda stories of Jewish heroism during World War II. Both SOVA and the Russian Jewish Congress criticized the articles as anti-Semitic, stating they falsified history.

International news media reported widespread criticism on social media outlets of a reality TV show featuring a Holocaust-themed ice skating routine, which aired on Channel One on November 28. The skaters, including the wife of a government official, wore Nazi concentration camp striped pajamas featuring the yellow six-pointed star. The dance was choreographed by a Jewish ice skater. An official from the Israel and Jewish Affairs Council criticized the performance as “unbelievably tasteless” but he and other representatives of Jewish groups expressed hope the controversy and criticism of the show would remind people of the horrors of the Holocaust.

According to Jehovah’s Witnesses, the Russian media regularly reported stories critical of the group, which the group said negatively influenced public opinion towards it.

The Russian Jewish Congress published a report in November stating public attitudes towards Jews had improved “dramatically” in comparison to previous years.

The SOVA Center reported 33 acts of vandalism motivated by religious, ethnic, or ideological hatred across 14 regions of the country (compared to 44 such acts in 2015). There were nine instances of swastikas and neo-Nazi graffiti on Soviet-era monuments. Acts of vandalism against religious sites included defacement of eight Jehovah’s Witnesses buildings, desecration of three Jewish cemeteries, attempted arson at a synagogue, the burial of a pig’s head at the construction site of a new Jewish center, the desecration of the grave of an Orthodox bishop, four instances of Orthodox crosses being damaged, arson damage to a historic building at an Orthodox monastery, two instances of vandalism of Buddhist sites, one instance of vandalism at a mosque, and one instance of vandalism at an Islamic cemetery.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The Ambassador and embassy representatives met with a range of government officials, including Ambassador Konstantin Dolgov, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Special Representative for Human Rights, to discuss the treatment of religious minorities, and the revocation of the registration of some religious organizations. Embassy officers raised consular cases with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs involving the discriminatory enforcement of the law against U.S. citizens who had engaged in religious activity, including preventing them from obtaining

legal counsel, not allowing them to speak in their own defense at legal hearings, and not providing adequate translations into English so they could understand the nature of the proceedings against them. Consular officers attended hearings of a U.S. citizen accused of violating laws on missionary activities.

The Ambassador met with ROC Patriarch Kirill in August and Bishop Tikhon in September to discuss ROC-state relations, interfaith cooperation, religion in society, and ways to promote religious tolerance.

In February the Ambassador met with Rabbi Berel Lazar, Chairman of the Federation of Jewish Communities, to discuss the state of the Jewish community in the country. The Ambassador had similar meetings throughout the year with representatives of the Russian Jewish Congress, the World Jewish Congress, and National Coalition Supporting Eurasian Jewry.

In November the U.S. Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism visited Moscow and spoke at a conference on anti-Semitism organized by the Russian Jewish Congress. He met with community leaders, civil society groups, and academics.

In July the Ambassador met with Mufti Sheikh Ravil Gaynutdin, Chair of the Russia Muftis Council and the Religious Board of Muslims of the Russian Federation, to discuss the state of Islam in the country.

In October the Ambassador met with Papal Nuncio Archbishop Celestino Migliore to discuss the state of Roman Catholicism in the country and the relationship between the Catholic Church and the ROC.

Representatives from the embassy and the consulates in St. Petersburg, Yekaterinburg, and Vladivostok met regularly with the ROC, rabbis and leaders of the Jewish community, muftis and other Islamic leaders, Protestant pastors, Catholic priests, Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Buddhists. These discussions covered developments related to religious legislation, government practices, and specific religious freedom cases.

Embassy and other U.S. government officers also met with civil society and human rights leaders to discuss religious legislation, government practices, and country-specific cases of religion and religious freedom. The groups included religious charities, the Russian Civic Chamber, the Slavic Center for Law and Justice, and the SOVA Center for Information and Analysis.

Embassy officers met with U.S. missionaries and religious workers to inquire about their experiences with immigration, registration, and police authorities, as well as with local populations, as a gauge of religious freedom.