

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	569
Land:	Ukraine
Kilde:	Forum 18
Titel:	OCCUPIED UKRAINE: Criminal case against Jehovah's Witness "leader"
Udgivet:	29. august 2025
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	20. oktober 2025



Document #2129824

Forum 18 (Author)

OCCUPIED UKRAINE: Criminal case against Jehovah's Witness "leader"

Felix Corley, [Forum 18](#)

Russian officials in occupied Donetsk Region arrested and charged a man identified only as K. for being a "leader of the banned religious organisation Jehovah's Witnesses". The Russian-controlled Donetsk Supreme Court said he had been active in the organisation the Russians deem "extremist" between 2018 and 2023. A Donetsk court ordered two months' pre-trial detention. If convicted, he faces up to six years in jail. "No individual should be criminally charged or detained simply for practising their religion", UN Secretary-General António Guterres declared in a May report on Russian-occupied Ukraine.

On 26 August, the Russian-controlled Donetsk Supreme Court announced that a man it identified only as K. is facing criminal charges of "participating in a banned extremist organisation". If convicted, he faces a possible maximum six-year jail term. It described the man – who has been ordered held in pre-trial detention for two months – as a "leader of the banned religious organisation Jehovah's Witnesses". The man was arrested on 22 May and the court ordered him held in pre-trial detention. On 20 June, the court ordered his transfer to house arrest with a ban on certain activities.

Forum 18 called the Russian-controlled Donetsk Investigative Committee. The duty officer listened to Forum 18 identifying itself and outlining the case, then put the phone down (see below).

It is unclear if he was held in Investigation Prison No. 1 in Donetsk. An official of the Russian-controlled Prisons Administration for Donetsk Region refused to give Forum 18 any information or give a number of a relevant official at Investigation Prison No. 1. He claimed the prison has no telephones. A listed number for the prison was unreachable (see below).

Officials at the office of the Russian-appointed Human Rights Ombudsperson for Donetsk Darya Morozova did not answer the phone each time Forum 18 called (see below).

Russia banned Jehovah's Witnesses as "extremist" in 2017. It is imposing this ban on areas of Ukraine it has illegally occupied. Russian-controlled courts in occupied Crimea have already jailed Jehovah's Witnesses for continuing to meet for worship. Forum 18 is not aware of any prosecutions for this so far in other Russian-occupied regions of Ukraine (see below).

In a May report to the United Nations Human Rights Council on the situation of human rights in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine, UN Secretary-General António Guterres repeated earlier UN calls for Russia to respect freedom of religion or belief. "The occupying authorities of the Russian Federation continued to restrict the right to freedom of religion and belief for certain religious communities in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine," he declared (see below).

"No individual should be criminally charged or detained simply for practising their religion, including in the forms of collective worship and proselytizing, in accordance with international human rights law," Secretary-General Guterres insisted. "Religious groups in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine should enjoy access to their places of worship and be able to gather freely for prayer and other religious practices" (see below).

The official who answered the phone at the Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva promised to put Forum 18 through to an official who could give a response to Secretary-General Guterres' comments on violations of freedom of religion or belief in Russian-occupied parts of Ukraine. After Forum 18 waited on the line for several minutes the connection was cut. Subsequent calls went unanswered (see below).

Among the concerns UN Secretary-General Guterres raised was the 14-year jail term handed to Ukrainian Orthodox priest Fr Kostiantyn Maksimov from Tokmak in occupied Zaporizhzhia Region in August 2024. He is now in a labour camp in Russia's Saratov Region. On 27 June 2025, the Russian prison authorities transferred Fr Kostiantyn to a new strict-regime labour camp in the same Russian region (see below).

The Russian occupation authorities [continue to raid places of worship](#), particularly those of the Council of Churches Baptists. Their congregations choose not to seek official registration in any country where they operate. They also refuse to notify the authorities of the start of their activity. Russian officials claim that their exercise of freedom of religion or belief –

including meeting for worship or sharing their faith – is therefore illegal.

Russian-controlled courts continue to impose punishments for meeting for worship or sharing faith without Russian permission. Courts [are known to have punished](#) for "missionary" activity at least 1 person in May, 1 in June, 3 in July and 2 so far in August. Under provisions punishing religious communities for failing to give their full, official name under Russian registration, courts are known to have punished at least 1 community in May and 2 in June.

Russia's serious violations of freedom of religion or belief in occupied Ukraine

Russia [seriously violates freedom of religion or belief](#) and interlinked human rights in parts of Ukraine it illegally occupies (about a fifth of Ukraine's territory). Among such violations are:

- illegal annexation of territory and imposition of Russian law violating human rights;
- pressuring, kidnapping, torturing, jailing, and murdering religious leaders;
- stopping meetings for worship, banning and closing religious communities;
- jailing prisoners of conscience for exercising freedom of religion or belief;
- transnational repression;
- banning religious texts and purging libraries;
- "anti-missionary" prosecutions; and
- the broadcasting of disinformation against religious communities and believers.

It is illegal under international law for Russia to enforce its own laws on occupied Ukrainian territory, as Russia is [required to leave Ukrainian law in force](#).

Criminal case against Jehovah's Witness "leader"

On 26 August, the Russian-controlled Donetsk Supreme Court announced that a man it identified only as K. is facing a case under [Russian Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 2](#) ("Participating in a banned extremist organisation"). It described him as a "leader of the banned religious organisation Jehovah's Witnesses".

Punishments under Russian Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 2 are:

- two to six years' imprisonment, plus a possible ban on holding certain positions and/or carrying out certain activities for up to five years, and compulsory restrictions on freedom for up to one year after release;
- or a 300,000 to 600,000 Russian Rouble fine;

- or one to four years' assigned work and compulsory restrictions on freedom for up to one year, plus a possible ban on holding certain positions and/or carrying out certain activities for up to three years.

Since Russia's Supreme Court ordered the liquidation of Jehovah's Witness organisations in 2017 and [outlawed their activities as "extremist"](#), more than 800 people in Russia [have faced prosecution](#) under [Criminal Code Article 282.2](#) for "organising" (Part 1), or "participating in" (Part 2) the activities of a banned "extremist" organisation.

The Russian occupation authorities have similarly [prosecuted and jailed](#) Jehovah's Witnesses from occupied Crimea. Forum 18 is not aware of any prosecutions so far in other Russian-occupied regions of Ukraine.

The investigators who opened the criminal case in Donetsk accuse the man of "deliberate activity directly linked to" Jehovah's Witnesses "on the territory of the Donetsk People's Republic" between 26 September 2018 and 6 May 2023.

The man was arrested on 22 May and the Russian-controlled Voroshilov Inter-District Court in the city of Donetsk ordered that he be held in pre-trial detention for two months. The announcement gave no date for the decision. The decision has entered legal force. On 20 June, the court ordered his transfer to house arrest with a ban on certain activities.

Forum 18 called the Russian-controlled Donetsk Investigative Committee on 28 August. The duty officer listened to Forum 18 identifying itself and outlining the case, then put the phone down. Subsequent calls went unanswered.

Officials at the office of the Russian-appointed Human Rights Ombudsperson for Donetsk Darya Morozova did not answer the phone each time Forum 18 called on 28 August.

It is unclear if the man was held between 22 May and 20 June in Investigation Prison No. 1 in Donetsk. An official at the Russian-controlled Prisons Administration for Donetsk Region refused to give Forum 18 any information on 28 August or give a number of a relevant official at Investigation Prison No. 1. He claimed the prison has no telephones. A listed number for the prison was unreachable.

The Russian occupation authorities have earlier announced criminal cases against individuals they claimed were Jehovah's Witnesses. However, the individuals were not Jehovah's Witnesses.

[Further United Nations call to Russian occupation forces](#)

In a report to the United Nations Human Rights Council on the situation of human rights in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine ([A/HRC/59/67](#)), published on 28 May, UN Secretary-General António Guterres repeated [earlier UN calls](#) for Russia to respect freedom of religion or belief.

"The occupying authorities of the Russian Federation continued to restrict the right to freedom of religion and belief for certain religious communities in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine," Guterres declared.

"All congregations of the Jehovah's Witnesses remained under a blanket prohibition." Guterres noted further [criminal prosecutions of Jehovah's Witnesses](#) in Russian-occupied Crimea. He also highlighted a fine on and stripping of registration from the [Alushta Muslim community](#) in Crimea. He noted the earlier [detention of two Greek Catholic priests](#), as well as "the seizure of churches, and pressure from the occupying authorities of the Russian Federation to reregister Catholic communities under Russian legislation".

Secretary-General Guterres also mentioned the 14-year jail term handed to Ukrainian Orthodox priest Fr Kostiantyn Maksimov from Tokmak in occupied Zaporizhzhia Region in August 2024 and who is [now in a labour camp in Russia's Saratov Region](#).

(On 27 June 2025, the Russian prison authorities transferred Fr Kostiantyn to a new strict-regime labour camp in the same Russian region. His new address:

410080 g. Saratov

Sokursky trakt d. 57

FKU Ispravitelnaya koloniya No. 10 UFSIN Rossii po Saratovskoi oblasti, Russian Federation)

"The priest had earlier been removed from his position in the church for refusing to pray for the Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church and criticizing priests who cooperated with the occupying authorities of the Russian Federation," Secretary-General Guterres noted. "He was arrested while attempting to leave the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine and tried in secret proceedings."

"I urge the Russian Federation to ensure that the rights to freedom of expression and opinion, association, thought, conscience and religion can be freely exercised by all individuals and groups living in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine without discrimination on any grounds or unjustified interference," Guterres insisted.

"No individual should be criminally charged or detained simply for practising their religion, including in the forms of collective worship and

proselytizing, in accordance with international human rights law. Religious groups in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine should enjoy access to their places of worship and be able to gather freely for prayer and other religious practices."

The official who answered the phone at the Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva on 28 August promised to put Forum 18 through to an official who could give a response to Secretary-General Guterres' comments on violations of freedom of religion or belief in Russian-occupied parts of Ukraine. After Forum 18 waited on the line for several minutes the connection was cut. Subsequent calls went unanswered. (END)

ecoi.net description:

Donetsk Oblast: Jehovah's Witness arrested and charged with "participating in a banned extremist organisation"

Countries:

Russian Federation, Ukraine

Source:

[Forum 18](#) (Author)

Published:

29 August 2025

Original link:

https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2998

Document type:

Appeal or News Release

Language:

English

Available on ecoi.net since:

23 September 2025

Document ID:

2129824

Austrian Red Cross
Austrian Centre for
Country of Origin and
Asylum Research and
Documentation
(ACCORD)

Wiedner Hauptstraße
32, 1041 Wien
T +43 1 589 00 583
F +43 1 589 00 589
info@ecoi.net

Contact
Imprint & Disclaimer
F.A.Q.
Data Protection Notice

ecoi.net is run by the Austrian Red Cross (department ACCORD) in cooperation with Informationsverbund Asyl & Migration. ecoi.net is funded by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, the Austrian Ministry of the Interior and Caritas Austria. ecoi.net is supported by ECRE & UNHCR.

