

KYRGYZSTAN: Trials imminent for detained Reform Adventists?

Trial dates are likely to be set in early September for four more True and Free Reform Adventists. The regime banned the Church in 2025 after jailing the leader. The four are accused of producing or distributing "extremist" literature. All could be jailed. The fifth was fined on 18 August for participating in a court-banned "extremist" organisation. "We discovered that they were involved in extremist activity," says Police Investigator Adilet Asanbayev. Asked what exactly constituted "extremism" in their activity, he replied: "They had Adventist books in their homes, which is banned in Kyrgyzstan."

Prosecutors have handed criminal cases against five members of the now-banned True and Free Reform Seventh-day Adventist Church to Bishkek's Birinchi May (Pervomaisky) District Court for trial. Four of the five appear to be facing separate trials on charges of producing or distributing "extremist" literature. They all face possible jail terms if convicted. Trial dates are likely to be set in early September. The fifth was fined on 18 August on charges of participating in a court-banned "extremist" organisation.



Olga Selova

Private

Birinchi May District Court put all five - Yevgeny Zhuravsky, Igor Kozlov, Sergey Kozlov, Olga Selova and Valeriya Yantsen – in two months' pre-trial detention at a late-night hearing on 17 June. Four of them remain in detention awaiting trial. Selova was freed on court orders on 18 August after being fined and had to sign an undertaking not to leave the country (see below).

Investigator Adilet Asanbayev adamantly defended the investigation and prosecution of the True and Free Adventists. "We discovered that they were involved in extremist activity," he told Forum 18. Asked what exactly constituted "extremism" in their activity, he replied: "They had Adventist books in their homes, which is banned in Kyrgyzstan." Asked why Adventists cannot have their books in their homes, he replied: "Well, you may not know the Adventist Church was banned in Kyrgyzstan by the Court" (see below).

Neither Investigator Asanbayev nor Birinchi May District Court answered Forum 18's question why the arrested Adventists are being tried individually under the same charges. However, two Adventists told Forum 18 separately that the Investigator tried to find evidence to try them as a group (which would lead to higher punishments), but could not. "Apparently the Investigator could not fabricate the case as an organised violation," one noted (see below).

Judge Tilek Turdukulov, who is to hear the cases of Igor Kozlov and Zhuravsky, refused to answer Forum 18's questions about what constituted "extremism" in their actions. "At the moment the cases of Igor Kozlov and Yevgeny Zhuravsky are being tried in Court under Criminal Code Article 332 for production and dissemination of extremist materials," he said via his Assistant. "We cannot arrange your meeting or put you through to the Judge by any other way since his communication with you before the trial is over is unlawful" (see below).

The trials come nearly two years after the regime launched a crackdown on the True and Free Reform Adventists. National Security Committee (NSC) secret police arrested the leader, Pavel Shreider, in November 2024. A Bishkek court later jailed him for three years. He was freed in March 2026 when the Supreme Court changed his prison term to a fine. NSC secret police officers deported him on 9 April 2026 (see below).

In March 2025, Alamudin District Court in Chuy Region banned the True and Free Reform Adventist Church as an "extremist" religious organisation. The civil case had been brought by Chuy Region Prosecutor's Office with the close involvement of the NSC secret police (see below).

In 2025, officials added the True and Free Adventist Church to the "list of organisations deemed terrorist and extremist by the courts" on the websites of the General Prosecutor's Office and the Justice Ministry's Probation Department. The General Prosecutor's Office also includes on its list of "informational materials deemed extremist by the courts" unnamed "printed and electronic versions of materials (books)" produced by the Church, based on the March 2025 Alamudin District Court decision (see below).

True and Free Adventists told Forum 18 that after their Church's leader, Pastor Pavel Shreider, and others were arrested, interrogated and initially tortured in November 2024 when the authorities began a massive campaign of raids against Church members, "almost half of the community fled Kyrgyzstan fearing for their lives". They added that "We are not a large community" (see below).

Meanwhile, Pastor Dmitry Golovin who leads a congregation in Bishkek of the Council of Churches Baptists is appealing against a summary fine for leading an unregistered worship meeting. The next appeal hearing is due on 7 September. His latest fine follows a 19 April raid on the church by NSC secret police officers alongside an official of the regime's National Agency for Religious Affairs and Interethnic Relations. Pastor Golovin told Forum 18 that the officials conducting the raid told him that "If we keep meeting for unregistered worship, the authorities may open a criminal case against us" (see below).

Others jailed for exercising freedom of religion or belief



Asadullo Madraimov, Osh, 3 April 2026

Khusanbai Saliyev

In addition to members of the True and Free Reform Seventh-day Adventist Church, the regime has jailed others for exercising freedom of religion or belief.

Muslim prisoner of conscience Asadullo Madraimov was arrested in October 2023 and [jailed for three years](#) in February 2024. He was punished for criticising the authorities for closing Kara-Suu District's Al-Sarakhsi Mosque in the southern Osh Region. He was [freed on 25 March 2026](#) at the end of his sentence. (Each day in pre-trial detention before a verdict comes into force counts as two days of a sentence.)

On 3 April, ten days after his release, Madraimov visited his lawyer Khusanbai Saliyev in Osh. "He told me he has lost his health, and in our country, medical rehabilitation projects have been closed," Saliyev told Forum 18 the same day.

Another member of the Al-Sarakhsi Mosque community, Mamirzhan Tashmatov, was [freed from prison](#) in May 2024.

In July 2023, a court jailed Protestant Aytbek Tynaliyev [for 6 months](#) for allegedly "inciting religious enmity" for social media posts sharing his faith.

On 4 December 2019, the National Security Committee (NSC) secret police [opened a criminal case](#) against so far unspecified members of the Jehovah's Witness national centre in Bishkek under Article 313, Part 2, Point 2 of the Criminal Code then in force. This punishes "Incitement of racial, ethnic, national, religious or inter-regional enmity (discord) conducted by a group of people in a prior conspiracy" with jail terms.

Forum 18 asked the NSC secret police in writing on 26 March 2026 (re-sent on 26 May):

- Whether the criminal case is continuing or has been closed;
- If it has been closed, when it was closed; and
- Why local Jehovah's Witnesses have not been kept informed of the course of this criminal investigation.

Forum 18 had received no response by the end of the working day in Bishkek of 28 August.

True and Free Reform Seventh-day Adventist Church among banned communities



Pastor Pavel Shreider, Birinchi May (Pervomaisky) District Court, Bishkek, 17 April 2025
Vera Shreider

The True and Free Reform Seventh-day Adventist Church in Kyrgyzstan is part of a reform movement within Adventism that emerged during the Soviet period. (It is separate from the Seventh-day Adventist Church, with its headquarters in the United States.) One of its leaders, prisoner of conscience Vladimir Shelkov, [died in a Soviet labour camp in 1980](#).

The Church – which was led by Pastor Pavel Shreider – chooses not to seek state registration. Exercising freedom of religion or belief without state registration is [illegal and punishable](#).

The National Security Committee (NSC) secret police arrested Pavel Davidovich Shreider (born 10 January 1960) in Bishkek in November 2024. Officers [searched his home and those of about 10 other church members](#). They seized thousands of books, including Bibles, as well as cash and mobile phones. They tortured him and another detained Church member.

On 10 July 2025, nearly three months after his criminal trial began, Bishkek's Birinchi May (Pervomaisky) District Court [convicted Pastor Shreider](#) on charges of "incitement of racial, ethnic, national, religious, or regional enmity". Judge Ubaydulla Satimkulov jailed the then 65-year-old Pastor for three years in a general regime labour camp. The Judge ordered his deportation to Russia at his own cost at the end of the prison term.

On 25 March 2026, the Supreme Court [left Pastor Shreider's conviction unchanged](#), including the deportation order. However, it changed the remainder of his prison term to a fine of 150,000 Soms. This represents about three months' average local wage for those in formal work. Officials [released Pastor Shreider](#) later on 25 March. He reluctantly paid the fine on 9 April 2026, hours before NSC secret police officers deported him.



True and Free Reform Adventist church, Lenin, Chuy Region
Private

On 19 March 2025, Alamudin District Court in Chuy Region [banned the True and Free Reform Adventist Church](#) as an "extremist" religious organisation. The civil case had been brought by Chuy Region Prosecutor's Office with the close involvement of the NSC secret police.

Indira Aslanova, Senior Expert of the Centre for Religious Studies, an independent organisation in Bishkek, [told Forum 18 in July 2025](#) that accusing the True and Free Adventists of "extremism" is "absurd".

On 4 August 2025, Kyrgyzstan's Supreme Court in Bishkek [rejected the appeal](#) against the ban. The Supreme Court upheld the ban permanently, and there is no possibility of challenging it in Kyrgyzstan.

In 2025, officials added the True and Free Adventist Church to the "list of organisations deemed terrorist and extremist by the courts" on the websites of the General Prosecutor's Office and the Justice Ministry's Probation Department. The General Prosecutor's Office also includes on its list of "informational materials deemed extremist by the courts" unnamed "printed and electronic versions of materials (books)" produced by the Church, based on the March 2025 Alamudin District Court decision.

The Church can no longer meet for worship because of the ban. It previously met in its place of worship in the village of Lenin in Alamudun District of Chuy Region, just north of Bishkek. Officials have not seized the place of worship.

The regime has previously [banned Ahmadi Muslims](#), and [cancelled the state registration of a Falun Gong association](#).

Searches, interrogations, arrests



Yevgeny Zhuravsky

Private

On 13 April, just four days after the secret police deported Pastor Pavel Shreider, police [opened a criminal investigation](#) related to members of the True and Free Reform Adventist Church. The Investigator is Adilet Asanbayev of the Police of Bishkek's Birinchi May (Pervomaisky) District.

On 28 May, Birinchi May District Court approved Investigator Asanbayev's request to conduct house searches of Church members as part of the criminal investigation.

The court decision notes that an officer of the Police Counter Extremism and Illegal Migration Service submitted a written report to Birinchi May District Police on 13 April. He claimed he had received "operational information" that a group of people from Bishkek and the villages of Mayevka and Lenin had "spread the ideology of the extremist organisation" of the True and Free Reform Adventist Church. The criminal investigation was launched on this basis.

The officer claimed that "operational investigative measures" had established that Church members continued to meet at Church leaders' homes on Saturdays (the holy day for Adventists).

On Saturday 6 June, police raided at least seven homes of Church members in and around Bishkek. Officers searched the homes and seized documents and mobile telephones. Officers then detained several of the Adventists and took them for questioning. They released all of them later that day.

Church members then found out about the case under Criminal Code Article 332 ("Production and distribution of extremist materials").

On 12 June, the Justice Ministry's State Service for Judicial Expert Analysis completed its "expert analysis" of books seized from Church members. This noted that Church members refuse military service. "When in the army, people cannot be simultaneously faithful to their faith and to the orders of their superiors," the analysis quotes a Church book as declaring. It claims that a text describes Church members as the "people of God" who are "opposed to people of secular views". It adds that "religious convictions are placed above service to the country and civic duty".

On 15 June, police summoned some of the True and Free Reform Adventists questioned earlier for further interrogation. Officers focused on whether the individuals had Church publications which officials had deemed "extremist".

Initially police summoned Church member Yevgeny Zhuravsky. They decided to hold him for 48 hours until a court could approve his pre-trial detention. Towards evening that day, police summoned other Church members for questioning, including Igor Kozlov, Sergey Kozlov, Olga Selova and Valeriya Yantsen. The four were similarly placed in 48-hour detention (at least one of them at 2 am on 16 June). Officers threatened to hunt down Church members who had fled abroad.

On 15 June, Investigator Asanbayev [formally launched a criminal case](#) against the five Church members, according to court documents.

Officers again searched Church members' homes and confiscated literature. They returned most of it, but sent some for "expert analysis".

Five Adventists put in pre-trial detention



Sergey Kozlov

Private

Police Investigator Adilet Asanbayev presented pre-detention requests against five True and Free Reform Adventists - Yevgeny Zhuravsky, Igor Kozlov, Sergey Kozlov, Olga Selova and Valeriya Yantsen – to Bishkek's Birinchi May (Pervomaisky) District Court. Late in the evening of 17 June, Judge Aida Zhogoshtiyeva ordered all five [held in pre-trial detention](#) for two months as the investigation proceeded. Officials then took the five Adventists to Bishkek Prison No. 21.

Zhuravsky and Selova are Kyrgyz citizens. Yantsen is a Russian citizen. The brothers Igor and Sergey Kozlov are Tajik citizens.

One Adventist fined, four still in detention awaiting trial

Although the detention was due to end on 15 August, the five True and Free Reform Adventists were not freed as the criminal cases were handed to court for trial.

At her trial on 18 August, Judge Iskander Sargaldakov of Birinchi May Court reclassified the charges against Selova under Criminal Code Article 331, Part 5 ("Participation in the activity of an extremist organisation liquidated or banned by a court"). Punishments range from a

fine of 200 to 500 Financial Indicators or imprisonment for up to two years.

Judge Sargaldakov fined Selova 20,000 Soms (about 2 weeks' average wage) and ordered her release from detention with Selova's written undertaking not to leave the country. "Although the prosecution still has the right to appeal and challenge the release from detention," Adventists told Forum 18 on 25 August.

Trials of other four imminent?



Birinchi May (Pervomaisky) District Court, Bishkek
Jehovah's Witnesses

Prosecutors handed the cases against the five True and Free Reform Adventists to Birinchi May District Court for trial. Four of the five - Yevgeny Zhuravsky, Igor Kozlov, Sergey Kozlov and Valeriya Yantsen - are facing trial under Criminal Code Article 332 ("Production, distribution, transportation or forwarding of extremist materials, or their acquisition or storage for the purpose of distribution, the use of symbols or attributes of extremist organisations, as well as through the Internet or mass media").

It remains unclear if the four will be tried under Part 1 or Part 2 of Article 332. Part 2 punishes such activity when carried out by a group and carries much heavier punishment.

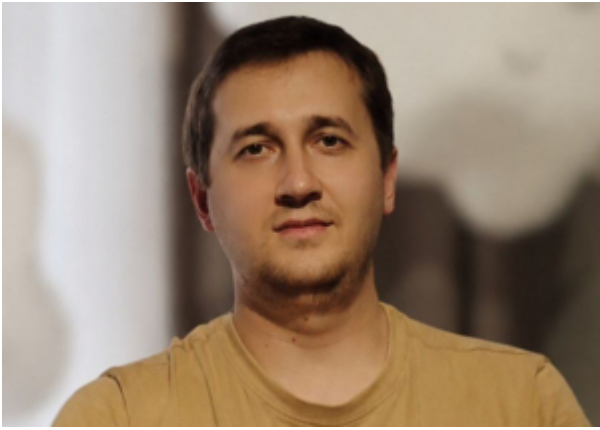
Judge Tilek Turdukulov will hear the cases against Zhuravsky and Igor Kozlov. "He will hear the cases of Yevgeny Zhuravsky and Igor Kozlov after 6 September since all the hearings before that date were postponed because of the Summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation," the Court told the Adventists. The SCO Summit will be held in Bishkek from 31 August to 1 September.

Judge Iskander Sargaldakov will "also hear the case of Valeriya Yantsen sometime after 6 September".

Sergey Kozlov's case was referred to Birinchi May Court, but details of his hearing are not yet known, Adventists told Forum 18.

Judge refuses to say why he keeps defendants in custody, what constituted "extremism" in Adventists'

actions



Igor Kozlov

Private

The Assistant of Judge Tilek Turdukulov, who is to hear the cases of Igor Kozlov and Yevgeny Zhuravsky, on 26 August wrote down Forum 18's questions:

- what exactly constituted "extremism" in the actions of the arrested Adventists;
- whether the Court has any evidence of calls by the Adventists to violence against members of other faiths;
- whether they have coerced their members or visitors to illegal actions;
- why the Court will not free the Adventists from custody.

Some minutes later Judge Turdukulov through his Assistant told Forum 18 that he is "not competent" to answer Forum 18's questions.

"At the moment the cases of Igor Kozlov and Yevgeny Zhuravsky are being tried in Court under Criminal Code Article 332 for production and dissemination of extremist materials," the Assistant responded. "We cannot arrange your meeting or put you through to the Judge by any other way since his communication with you before the trial is over is unlawful."

Four Adventists await trial in detention



Investigation Prison No. 21, Bishkek, December 2024

Maksat Kutmanbekov (RFE/RL)

Four of the five True and Free Reform Adventists - Yevgeny Zhuravsky, Igor Kozlov, Sergey Kozlov and Valeriya Yantsen - remain in Bishkek Prison No. 21 as they await trial. Their

address:

720005 Bishkek,
Oktyabr District,
Geologicheskii pereulok 2,
Uchrezhdenie No. 21 Ispolneniya Nakazaniy

"This is a real threat to at least 20 others"

Police Investigator Adilet Asanbayev told True and Free Reform Adventists on 16 June that he [would look into the activity of other Church members](#) and summon them for interrogation. He said he was looking to charge suspects as a group. "This is a real threat to at least 20 others," one Church member told Forum 18.

Police have not begun new cases against other members of the Church, Forum 18 has learned.

Investigator sought to upgrade charges

Investigator Adilet Asanbayev [was investigating those detained](#) under Criminal Code Article 332, Part 1. This punishes "Production, distribution, transportation or forwarding of extremist materials, or their acquisition or storage for the purpose of distribution, the use of symbols or attributes of extremist organisations, as well as through the Internet or mass media". Punishments are a jail term of 3 to 5 years, with or without a subsequent ban on specific activity for up to 3 years.

"The Article talks about 'storage for the purpose of distribution'," one Church member [told Forum 18 in June](#). "There was no actual distribution, it's just that they found these items on their phones. And now they're applying this Article to it."

Sources told Adventists that Investigator Asanbayev was [seeking to upgrade the charges](#) to Criminal Code Article 332, Part 2. This punishes those acting as a group and bears a prison term of 5 to 7 years, with or without a subsequent ban on specific activity for up to 3 years.

Investigator Asanbayev on 26 August refused to give Forum 18 details of his investigation.

"Apparently the Investigator could not fabricate the case as an organised violation"

Neither Investigator Adilet Asanbayev nor Birinchi May District Court answered Forum 18's question why the arrested Adventists are being tried individually under the same charges.

However, two Adventists told Forum 18 separately that the Investigator tried to find evidence to try them as a group, but could not. "Apparently the Investigator could not

fabricate the case as an organised violation," one noted.

"The only 'evidence' Asanbayev has is the Adventist books confiscated from our members' homes during the raids."

Keeping Adventist books at home constitutes extremism?

Investigator Adilet Asanbayev adamantly defended the investigation and prosecution of the True and Free Adventists. "We discovered that they were involved in extremist activity," he told Forum 18 on 26 August.

Asked what exactly constituted "extremism" in the activity of the Adventists, Investigator Asanbayev replied: "They had Adventist books in their homes, which is banned in Kyrgyzstan." Asked why Adventists cannot have their books in their homes, he replied: "Well, you may not know the Adventist Church was banned in Kyrgyzstan by the Court."

Adventist Church banned for asking for offerings?

Forum 18 asked Investigator Adilet Asanbayev:

- why in March 2025 a court [banned the Church](#), which peacefully exists in many other countries of the world;
- what exactly constitutes "extremism" in the teachings or actions of the Church members;
- whether Church members have called for violence;
- or whether they have coerced their members or visitors of the Church to do something illegal.

Asanbayev paused without giving an answer.

"Well, there are people who in the past attended the Church, and who complained to us that it teaches that members must give 20 percent of their income to the Church," Asanbayev then replied.

Told that religious communities worldwide usually collect offerings, and teach their members to support them financially, and told that the True and Free Adventist Church was not banned even in neighbouring countries, and asked why offerings served as a basis to prosecute Church members and ban the Church, Investigator Asanbayev replied: "Yes, I know they are not banned in Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and so on but our Court banned them. I cannot tell why, ask the Court."

Forum 18 asked Investigator Asanbayev why he investigated a case where there is no evidence of "extremism", and why he wants to bring more serious charges against the Adventists. He did not answer and declined to talk further.

National Agency for Religious Affairs puts blame on Court

Forum 18 asked Deputy Chair Meder Karabayev and Chief Specialist Alisher Alybayev of the National Agency for Religious Affairs and Interethnic Relations in Bishkek on 26 August:

- what exactly constituted "extremism" in the activity of the True and Free Adventist Church and its members;
- and why the Agency made a decision to give an "expert analysis" to deem the Church an "extremist organisation".

Both refused to talk to Forum 18.

Karabayev saw the questions but did not respond. Alybayev told Forum 18: "Why are you blaming us? Ask the Court, they banned them." He did not respond when Forum 18 wrote that the Court based its decision on the Agency's "expert analysis".

Almost half of community have fled Kyrgyzstan

True and Free Adventists told Forum 18 that after their Church's leader, Pastor Pavel Shreider, and others were arrested, interrogated and initially tortured in November 2024 when the authorities began a massive campaign of raids against Church members, "almost half of the community fled Kyrgyzstan fearing for their lives". They added that "We are not a large community".

"We think that the authorities should find and punish the real extremists and terrorists"

Relatives of the arrested Adventists wrote complaints to several foreign governments, as well as the United Nations. They draw attention to the fact that Kyrgyzstan's authorities have in the past received assistance from these governments and the UN for the fight against extremism and terrorism.

"In order to justify the funds and assistance they have received, Kyrgyzstan's authorities have prosecuted [True and Free Adventists] and other peaceful religious believers from other faiths," they lamented to Forum 18. "We think that the authorities should find and punish the real extremists and terrorists, and not us. We think that these governments should stop giving assistance to Kyrgyzstan."

Council of Churches Baptists warned of possible criminal case



Dmitri Golovin, October 2025

Dmitri Golovin

Pastor Dmitry Golovin leads a congregation in Bishkek of the Council of Churches Baptists. They meet without state registration. On 19 April, National Security Committee (NSC) secret police officers alongside an official of the regime's National Agency for Religious Affairs and Interethnic Relations again [raided the church's Sunday morning meeting for worship](#).

Pastor Golovin told Forum 18 that the officials conducting the raid told him that "If we keep meeting for unregistered worship, the authorities may open a criminal case against us".

On 21 April, an official of the National Agency drew up a record of an offence against Pastor Golovin under Violations Code Article 142, Part 7 ("Carrying out religious activity and using a facility for religious purposes without state registration"). He [summarily fined him](#) 200 Financial Indicators, 20,000 Soms (about two weeks' average wage for those in formal work).

Pastor Golovin appealed against the fine to Bishkek's Lenin District Court. Hearings took place on 27 July and 11 and 13 August. The next hearing is scheduled for 7 September, he told Forum 18.

Golovin told Forum 18 that he and Aleksey Demchenko, another Church member, reluctantly paid the summary fines of 200 Financial Indicators, 20,000 Soms, each [handed down following a raid on their church](#) in September 2025, as well as another fine of 20,000 Soms for late payment. (END)

[More reports on freedom of thought, conscience and belief in Kyrgyzstan](#)

For more background, see [Forum 18's Kyrgyzstan religious freedom survey](#)

Forum 18's [compilation of Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe \(OSCE\) freedom of religion or belief commitments](#)

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