

Russian pastor sentenced for preaching against war

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A 63-year-old Russian Pentecostal pastor received a four-year sentence for preaching against Russia's invasion of Ukraine, an Oslo-based news service focused on human rights and religious freedom reported.



Nikolay Romanyuk

On Sept. 3, the Balashikha City court sentenced Pastor Nikolay Romanyuk to four years imprisonment in a labor camp—followed by a three-year ban on administering any website—for an anti-war sermon he preached in 2022, [Forum 18 reported](#).

Prosecutors accused the pastor of urging his audience—in person and online—to obstruct the work of military registration and enlistment offices in a sermon he delivered in September 2022 at Holy Trinity Pentecostal Church.

In the sermon, Romanyuk called the Russian invasion of Ukraine “not our war.”

In his final speech to the court, Romanyuk refused to back down.

“Yes, I gave a sermon in which I touched on military, albeit forced, murder. I do not retract what I said,” he told the court.

“I set forth my personal view and attitude towards the taking of a human life. This is my personal attitude as a clergyman. I do not retract my sermon.”

For criticizing Russia’s invasion of Ukraine from a religious perspective, Romanyuk was convicted of “public calls to implement activities directed against the security of the Russian Federation, or to obstruct the exercise of government bodies and their officials of their powers to ensure the security of the Russian Federation,” Forum 18 stated.

Romanyuk has spent more than 10 months in a pre-trial detention center in Noginsk since he was arrested and physically assaulted by authorities last year.

Others jail or fined for opposing war on religious grounds

Forum 18 reported Russian courts have sentenced four people to imprisonment and fined three others on criminal charges for opposing Russia’s war against Ukraine on religious grounds. Russia’s Justice Ministry also has added 12 religious leaders and activists to its register of foreign agents for related offenses, Forum 18 stated.

In a [July update on Russia](#), the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom identified by name four religious leaders—Pentecostal Bishop Albert Ratkin, Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt, Buddhist leader Erdni-Basan Ombadykov and Apostolic Orthodox Church Archbishop Grigory Mikhnov-Vaitenko—who were added to the nation’s foreign agents registry. Mikhnov-Vaitenko was fined 30,000 rubles in April for posting an anti-war

video in March 2022.

“Since Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, authorities have targeted anti-war protesters and religious leaders for expressing opposition to the war in religious terms,” the commission report stated.

The Russian government also has prosecuted members of several Protestant organizations for alleged ties to foreign religious communities.

“Russia continued to perpetrate particularly severe religious freedom violations against a wide range of religious groups in Russia and Russian-occupied territories of Ukraine, as well as civil society activists and human rights defenders who work on freedom of religion or belief issues,” the commission report stated.

Since 2017, the commission has recommended Russia be named a Country of Particular Concern for engaging in “systematic, ongoing and egregious” religious freedom violations. The U.S. Department of State designated Russia as a Country of Particular Concern in 2021, 2022 and 2023.