**Memorial recognizes Evgeny Kim, convicted for reading the works of Said Nursi, as a political prisoner**

Evgeny Kim, a resident of Blagoveshchensk, has become the latest person to be jailed for belonging to the mythical organization “Nudzhular.” He was sentenced to three years nine months in a general-regime prison colony under Article 282.2, Section 1, of the Russian Criminal Code (organization of the activity of a banned organization) and Article 282, Section 1 (actions, directed at incitement of hatred or hostility).

It is not the first time that the Russian authorities have prosecuted Muslims who study and distribute books from the Risale-i Nur (“Treatises of Light”) cycle by the Turkish religious scholar Bediuzzaman Said Nursi (1877 — 1960). In 2008, the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation designated the international religious association Nurdzhular, of which the followers of Nursi are supposedly members, as extremist. Law enforcement agencies consistently describe Nurdzhular as an “organization with a clear structure” disseminating Islamic and Turkish political influence in the world.

However, in reality, there exists only a non-political community of people who think of themselves as followers of the teachings expressed in Risale-i Nur, communicate with one another, and hold joint reading sessions. No evidence of the existence of a well-structured organization, controlled from Turkey, has yet been presented, and we consider this notion to be a fantasy of the Russian authorities.

So far as the books themselves are concerned, in 2007 14 translations of works by Nursi were banned by decision of the Koptevsky district court in Moscow. We consider this ban, like the subsequent ban on Nurdzhular, to be groundless. The arguments, put forward by the experts on whose opinions the court based its decision, are absurd. For example, the experts identified in the religious literature condemnation of sinners (and even self-condemnation of the repentant) and threatening of atheists with retribution after death. On this basis, they concluded that the texts are extremist in nature and advocate religious discord.

However, in point of fact, Nursi’s books contain no calls to violence or terrorism, nor the language of hate. The Council of Muftis of Russia, the Central Spiritual Administration of Muslims in Russia, and the Sova Centre, an independent think-tank, have all expressed the view that the writings of Nursi represent no danger to society and do not advocate violence. The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom has called for the ban to be reconsidered.

The charge of inciting hatred or hostility is based on conversations Kim had with persons who share his point of view. Some of these conversations concerned historical and semi-legendary events, including some linked with the life of Said Nursi. Others debated which of the peoples of the Caucasus are most devoted to Islam, in what European countries Islam is being spread, how Islam should be professed, and, finally, Nursi’s writings. There was no incitement to violence or discrimination in these conversations, and the conclusions of the psychologists and linguistic experts amount to turgid nonsense.

We see no other grounds for the prosecution of people who read, whether individually or as a group, the works of Said Nursi than the desire of law enforcement agencies to present the appearance of combating organized extremism.

Evgeny Kim must be released immediately and bans on religious literature that do not advocate violence lifted.

*Recognition of an individual as a political prisoner, or of a prosecution as politically motivated, does not imply that Memorial Human Rights Centre shares or approves the individual’s views, statements or actions.*

More information about the case of Evgeny Kim can be read [here](http://memohrc.us6.list-manage2.com/track/click?u=0beb3097c1&id=7f1b1b84ac&e=84458eadd1).

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