

Keeping Faith in Dagestan

As pastor of the largest Pentecostal church in Russia's largely Muslim republic of Dagestan, Artur Suleimanov was no stranger to opposition.

Early this year, authorities abruptly cancelled a five-year agreement with his Hosanna House of Prayer, located in the capital city of Makhachkala, that allowed the 1,000-member church to visit prisoners. More recently the Dagestan media broadcast calls for people to take action against the pastor because he converted ethnic Muslims, Compass Direct News reported. Still, it came as a shock when on July 15 a gunman walked up to Suleimanov as he was getting into a car outside his church and shot him in the head. The 49-year-old died an hour later, according to Barnabas Fund, a ministry that assists persecuted Christians.

Many see the attack as an attempt to intimidate converts from Islam. But those who knew Suleimanov, himself a convert from Islam, say his mission to reach Muslims with the gospel won't end. "You cannot scare Christians with murders," Pentecostal minister Sergei Ryakhovsky told the Interfaks religion news service. "For Christians to die for Christ is an honor."

Services will continue at Hosanna, led by assistant pastor Vladimir Chumakov.