

Best of Charisma: 7,000 Churches Fasting, Praying Over Terrifying New Persecution Law

Read Time: 3 Minutes 5 Seconds

Note: This article was originally published in August, 2016, by Charisma News.

Russian President Vladimir Putin signed an anti-terrorism law, but for the country's many churches, the signature sparked a demand for prayer and fasting.

The bill toughens punishment for acts deemed to be terrorism and for the organization of "mass unrest," according to the The Los Angeles Times. It would also introduce prison sentences of up to a year for those who fail to report such crimes.

Furthermore, Great Commission Ministries Chairman Hanny Haukka tells Charisma News the law entails:

- Foreign guests are not permitted to speak in churches unless they have a "work permit" from Russian authorities
- If a friend or relative from outside Russia wishes to share his/her faith in your home the guest will be fined and expelled from Russia.
- Any discussion of God with non-believers is considered missionary activity and will be punishable.
- Missionary activity will be permitted by special government permission. Example: If one traveling on a train shares his faith without written permission the offender will be taken into police custody for the

duration of the journey and will be fined 50,000 rubles (\$).

- Offenders from the age of 14-years-old will be subject to prosecution
- Religious activity is no longer permitted in private homes. Most churches in Russia meet in homes.
- Every citizen is obligated to report religious activity of neighbors to the authorities. Failure to be an informant is punishable by law.
- One may pray and read the Bible at home but not in the presence of a non-believing person. You will be breaking the law and be punished.
- If the church has purchased property it cannot be converted into a place of worship.
- In church buildings, it is not permitted to invite people to turn to God. Worship services are permitted but making a non-believer a follower of Christ is against the law.

In response, thousands of churches across the country have come together to cry out to God.

"The church is appalled at the news of the new law. About 7,000 evangelical/protestant churches are in fasting and prayer at the moment over the news," Haukka tells Charisma News via email.

Churches aren't the only residents enraged by the law.

American refugee Edward Snowden tweeted: "#Putin has signed a repressive new law that violates not only human rights, but common sense. Dark day for #Russia."

What's more, critics are now declaring the Yarovaya laws, aka the "Big Brother," laws, as a sign of the end times:

If these amendments come into force, prison sentences for certain non-violent "extremist" crimes will potentially be twice as long as, for example, murder committed in the heat of

passion, which carries a maximum sentence of three years.

Despite receiving nearly unanimous support in parliament, the Yarovaya laws have triggered a flood of apocalyptic commentary. Many wonder why Russia's already excessively harsh criminal laws are being made harsher.

The only official criticism of the legislation, however, has come from the Presidential Human Rights Council, which has highlighted ways in which the proposed amendments directly contradict the Constitution and existing laws. This criticism has been almost entirely ignored.

The Duma has already passed a number of laws that have harshened Russian law in the name of fighting terrorism and extremism. It criminalized "public calls for the violation of territorial integrity" and "rehabilitation of Nazism," a direct affront to the freedom of speech. In 2013, it passed a law that allowed the state to confiscate property from individuals affiliated with terrorists, including their relatives.

The government has long used the "fight against terrorism and extremism" to justify repressive laws, no matter how obviously senseless they may be. As a result, Russia's statutory framework can now be effectively used to target not only credible extremist threats, but also political opponents of the state. A large group of prominent Russian lawyers decried this problem in an open letter in 2013, saying that the "parliament's legislative work has acquired a distinctly prohibitive and repressive character."

In response, Haukka pleads with believers around the world to join with Russian churches in prayer and fasting.

"Russia is closing down in an awful way. The new law is in total conflict with the purpose and the task given to the church by the Lord. The law will send the church back into Soviet era Communist persecution," he says. {eo}

Bring *Charisma* magazine home with a subscription today!