

Persecuted Protester Abused Under Guise of 'Psychiatric Treatment'

Human rights groups are sounding the alarm in Russia. In a case similar to that of Kazakh pastor Bakhytzhan Kushkumbaev, a protester is being forced to undergo psychiatric treatment at a mental asylum.

Last week, 38-year-old Mikhail Kosenko was sentenced to the treatment for an indefinite amount of time.

He was convicted of assaulting a police officer at an anti-Vladimir Putin protest last year, despite video footage showing his innocence. According to *The Guardian*, the officer named as the victim in last summer's violence didn't recognize Kosenko as the person who attacked him. "I do not know this person," he told the court.

Multiple reports concur that Kosenko has a form of mental illness resulting from a military incident in the early 2000s. However, he has been receiving outpatient treatment for decades.

The Moscow court's decision in Kosenko's case has many concerned, including the Slavic Gospel Association (SGA).

"Rights campaigners in Russia are basically calling it a return to Soviet practices," says SGA's Joel Griffith. "Our prayer is that this would not continue and, above all, not be targeted at Christians."

"We've seen certainly in the past years a tightening up in many of the ex-Soviet countries ... so we just really need to pray. Pray for the protection of the church."

Pray also for Russian believers. Pray they would have more

freedom to worship the Lord and share the gospel.

When Russia was known as the Soviet Union, officials used so-called “psychiatric treatment” as a cover for abuse. In the early 1970s, the West started receiving reports of abuses taking place behind the Iron Curtain. Political and religious dissidents, including Christians, were put in maximum-security psychiatric hospitals without medical justification.

A 1989 investigation by a U.S. delegation found that patients were denied basic rights, suffered abuse and were punished medically if they violated strict hospital rules.

In some cases, a drug that causes severe pain, immobility, fever and muscle death was used for punishment. Other treatments included insulin coma, strict physical restraints and injections of atropine, a drug that increases heart rate.

If the use of psychiatric treatment as punishment were to continue, it would make evangelism practically impossible for Russian believers.

“They want to serve the Lord Jesus Christ,” Griffith says. “[The government knows believers] have a commitment and ... that they have a command from the Lord to carry out the Great Commission.”

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