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RUSSIA: Missionary's activity is "extremist", agrees court

By Geraldine Fagan, Forum 18

In the wake of a 1 December district court ruling in Tatarstan's capital Kazan that a decision denying Baptist church-planter Takhir Talipov a further residency permit should be upheld, Talipov's legal representative told Forum 18 News Service he sees little hope in having the verdict overturned. Fyodor Dzyuba said he had not even bothered to attend a hearing at the Tatarstan supreme court on 10 January. "I knew in advance we had very little chance." The supreme court is due to announce its decision by 20 January. A Kazan district court had accepted an assessment by the local FSB (former KGB) that the missionary work by Talipov, a Russian-born ethnic Tatar, was "extremist" and liable to threaten stability in the mainly Muslim republic.

The legal representative for Takhir Talipov, an ethnic Tatar Baptist church-planter denied a residency permit in Tatarstan due to his evangelical activity in the largely Muslim republic, has told Forum 18 News Service he sees little hope that a court ruling upholding the decision will be overturned. Fyodor Dzyuba said he saw no point in attending a hearing in the case at Tatarstan's supreme court in the regional capital Kazan on 10 January: "I knew in advance we had very little chance." That verdict should be formally announced by 20 January, he added.

In a closed hearing on 1 December, a Kazan district court upheld the 13 October decision by the passport and visa department of Tatarstan's Interior Ministry not to grant the residency permit to Talipov, a Russian-born Latvian resident who has been based in Kazan since 1992.

In reaching its verdict, the district court agreed that the passport and visa department was "legally justified" in refusing residency rights to Talipov. "They simply confirmed the department's decision," Dzyuba commented to Forum 18 from Kazan on 12 January.

The verdict stated that assertions contained in an assessment by the local FSB (former KGB) constitute legitimate grounds for denying residency rights (see F18News 28 November 2003 http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=198 .) In his capacity as a Baptist preacher, Talipov "tries to convert Muslims to his faith," according to the 9 October FSB assessment, and leads a religious group financed by "foreign clerical centres" which "does not have registration and functions illegally". Like the FSB, the district court concludes from this analysis that the activity of Talipov and certain members of his religious group is "extremist in character and poses a threat to the stability of the interconfessional and interethnic situation in Tatarstan".

In his 11 December appeal against this verdict to Tatarstan's supreme court, Dzyuba stressed that Talipov has never been under any kind of administrative or criminal investigation in any country.

According to Dzyuba, Talipov left Russia for Latvia on 25 November.

For more background information see Forum 18's latest religious freedom survey at

http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=116

A printer-friendly map of Russia is available at

<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/xpeditions/atlas/index.html?Parent=europe&Rootmap=russi>

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