

Russian Muslim Clerics Warn of Unrest Over Ban of Translation of Quran

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Russia's senior Islamic clerics warned the country's leaders Friday that unrest could erupt in Muslim communities in Russia and beyond if a court decision ordering the destruction of an interpretive translation of Quran was not overturned.

Tuesday's ruling by a court in Novorossiisk, a city in southern Russia, ordered the widely read text to be outlawed under a Russian anti-extremism law that rights activists say has been abused by local officials out of prejudice or to persecute groups frowned upon by the dominant Russian Orthodox Church.

Rights campaigners said the decision, which would apply nationwide unless it is overturned on appeal, came dangerously close to banning the Quran itself.

Russia's Council of Muftis sounded the alarm in an open letter on Friday to President Vladimir Putin, who has frequently called for unity among the leading faiths and warned that ethnic

tension could tear Russia apart.

"Russian Muslims are very strongly indignant over such an outrageous decision," Rushan Abbyasov, the deputy head of the council, which has close ties with the Kremlin said.

If the ruling is acted on, the cleric warned: "There will be unrest ... not only in Russia but all over the world. We are talking about the destruction of the Quran."

In the letter to Putin, the council drew a parallel with violence in the Middle East and Afghanistan over the actions of an American pastor, Terry Jones, who threatened to burn the Quran on Sept. 11, 2010.

"Is it necessary to discuss how the destruction of books, especially sacred religious books, has been received in Russia in the past?" it said.

"We recall how the burning of just a few copies of the Holy Koran by a crazy American pastor elicited a firm protest not just from Russian Muslims but from our entire society, in solidarity with the stormy and long-lasting anger of the global Muslim community and all people of goodwill," it said.

A lawyer representing the text's author, Azeri theologian Elmir Kuliyev, said he would appeal the ruling, which called for the text to be banned and copies of it "destroyed."

"This is pure idiocy. Some local prosecutor sent this material to a local court and they together decided to ban a holy book," lawyer Murat Musayev, who has one month to appeal the ruling said.

"On one hand, there is freedom of religion in Russia, on the other,, they are banning fundamental religious texts."

Experts say the more than decade-old translation by Kuliyev is a respected scholarly work, one of four translations of the Quran into Russian.

"This is one step away from banning the Quran," said Akhmed Yarlikapov, an expert on Islam with the Russian Academy of Sciences.

"This is a very high quality translation," he said. "The banning of Kuliyev's translation is utterly unprofessional. You could ban the Bible just as easily because it also has passages that talk about the spilling of blood."

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