

Chechen Leader Kadyrov Calls for Judge to Be Punished Over Ruling on Muslim Book

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Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov

Ramzan Kadyrov, the leader of Russia's North Caucasus republic of Chechnya, has pledged to “personally call to account” the Russian judge and prosecutor who deemed as “extremist” and banned from local distribution a book containing quotes and commentary on verses from the Quran.

The verdict by a Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk city court “will provoke million-strong protests in Russia and abroad and lead to the country's isolation from the Islamic world,” Kadyrov wrote on his Facebook page Wednesday.

He was commenting on a ruling by judge Natalya Perchenko, who sided with prosecutor Tatyana Bilobrovets to proclaim as “extremist” a book titled “The prayer (dua) to God: Its

meaning and place in Islam,” edited by a co-chairman of the Russian Council of Muftis, Nafigulla Ashirov.

“I demand a harsh punishment for the provocateurs who made this court verdict and who are trying to detonate the situation in our country,” Kadyrov said. “If they are not handled in a proper legal way, this will first of all make a criminal out of me. I will personally call them to account, because there is nothing in this life above the Quran for me, and I am ready to defend it to the end.”

He also called the judge and prosecutor “national traitors and shaitans [devils].”

The Russian Prosecutor General's Office responded by saying: “We believe it is unacceptable to insult a judge and a prosecutor on a matter connected to their professional activity — in particular to do so publicly,” according to spokeswoman Marina Gridneva, the state-run TASS news agency reported.

Kadyrov's words were “undoubtedly a threat,” said the leader of the For Human Rights movement Lev Ponomaryov, Interfax reported.

“This is completely unacceptable, especially when such a threat comes from the leader of a republic,” he was quoted as saying.

The Aug. 12 ruling by the Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk court said the book contained a “concealed appeal to commit illegal extremist actions, which is, in this court's opinion, socially dangerous for civil society, because it can create a positive attitude to extremism, affect people's world views and manipulate and rule [those people],” according to excerpts quoted by Sova, a group that analyses human rights issues, including the application of anti-extremism laws.

The 32-page book contains quotes from verses from various chapters of the Quran, accompanied by their Russian translation and commentary. Most passages urge the faithful to pray and to trust in Allah above all.

Sections of the book “point out the superiority of one group of people to other people on the basis of their attitude to religion, their affiliation with Islam, with Muslims,” according to the excerpts of the court ruling quoted by Sova.

One verse from the al-Jinn chapter of the Quran quoted in the book reads: “And among us are Muslims [in submission to Allah], and among us are the unjust,” according to an English-language translation provided by the Quran.com website. “And whoever has become Muslim — those have sought out the right course. But as for the unjust, they will be, for hell, firewood.”

Muslim leaders and rights group Sova lashed out at the verdict, arguing that pronouncing the superiority of one's faith over any others was typical for most of the world's religions.

“We are convinced that propaganda of the superiority of one religion over others cannot be considered a sign of extremism, because it goes against laws as well as common sense: Every believer is convinced of the truthfulness of the religion they follow,” Sova said in a statement.

The group also warned against trying to “regard ancient religious texts from the standpoint of modern law.”

Ashirov, the co-chairman of the Muftis council who edited the book, said the “world does not have a single religion or ideology that does not contrast its followers to other people,” according to remarks carried by Ansar.ru, a Muslim news portal.

Ashirov said his associates would appeal the court decision, Moscow's Govorit Moskva radio reported.

Ponomaryov, of the For Human Rights group, concurred that some Russian officials have been overzealous in finding signs of “extremism” in Islamic texts, Interfax reported.

“I am not familiar with this particular case, but I know cases when [officials] described as extremist the classical works of Muslim preachers who have never called for any violence,” Ponomaryov was quoted as saying.

Kadyrov has repeatedly promised to “call to account” prominent public figures including former tycoon-turned-opposition figure Mikhail Khodorkovsky and editor-in-chief of independent Ekho Moskvyy radio station Alexei Venediktov, whom he accused of being enemies of Muslims.

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