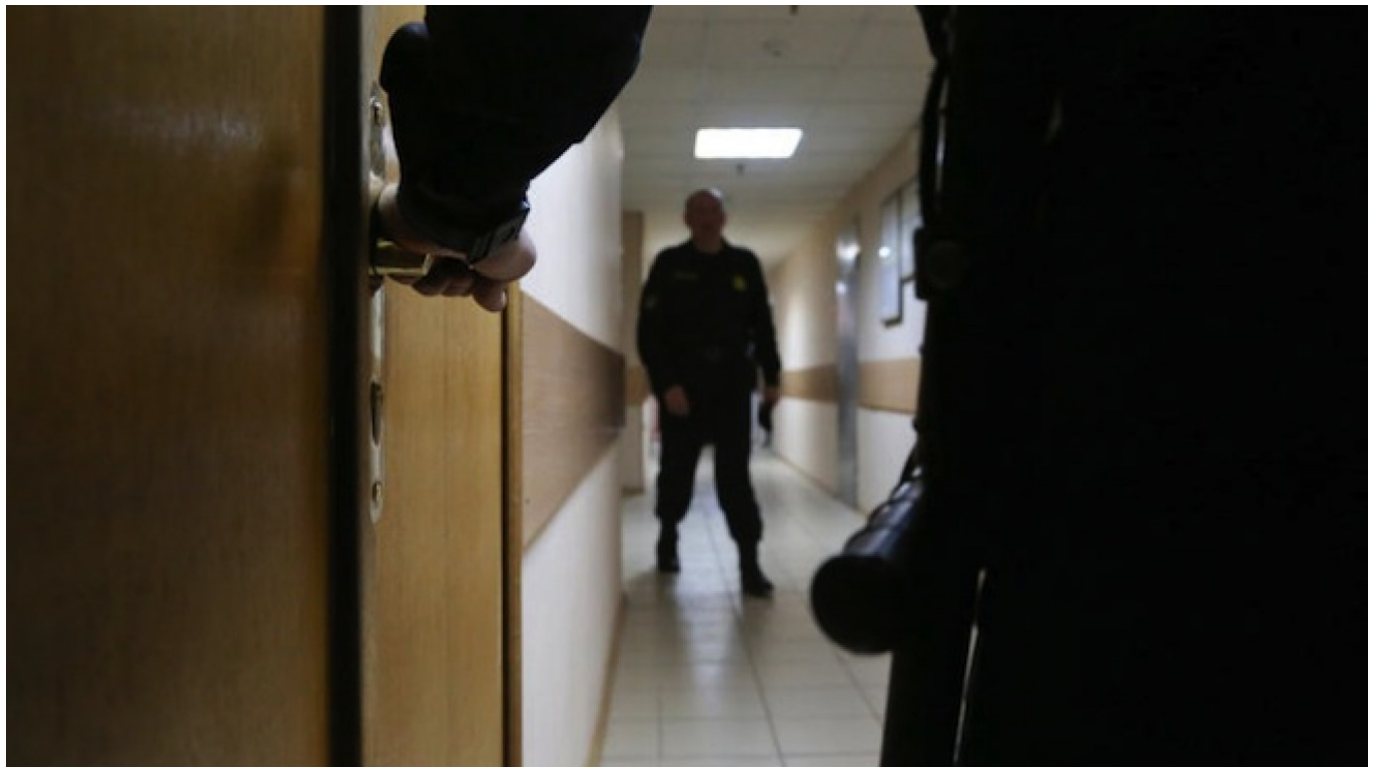


Rally in Russia's Dagestan Against Arrest of Conservative Cleric

By [Anna Dolgov](#)

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Police in Russia's North Caucasus republic of Dagestan dispersed a rally that protested the detention of an ultra-conservative Salafi mosque imam, who had been accused of recruiting fighters for Islamic State terrorist forces in Syria, the independent Kavkazsky Uzel news portal reported Wednesday.

The imam from the town of Derbent was detained in connection with a separate incident: He is accused of taking captive and attempting to rape a local woman, the LifeNews portal reported.

The Dagestan branch of Russia's Investigative Committee confirmed in a statement that a 54-year-old man from Derbent was detained on suspicion of “illegally depriving of freedom” a young woman and her 4-year-old daughter.

Investigators provided no further details on the detainee's identity, but said the suspect is accused of locking up the alleged victims earlier this week in a room on the territory of a local

mosque.

Police freed the woman, 27, and her child two hours later, the statement said.

More than 300 mosque-goers in Derbent gathered outside the town's Interior Ministry offices Wednesday to protest the detention, Kavkazsky Uzel reported.

An unidentified demonstrator said the rally was dispersed by “armed people” wearing masks and carrying protective shields, who pushed protesters off the street, allegedly hitting some with truncheons and firing shots in the air, Kavkazsky Uzel reported.

Some 20 demonstrators were detained, according to rally participants, the report said.

The Salafi mosque in Derbent drew attention last summer, when an open letter circulated by local residents accused its imam of recruiting fighters for terrorist forces in Syria, and appealed to the authorities to shut down the mosque. The authors of the letter identified themselves as the mothers of young men who had left for Syria, Kavkasky Uzel reported.

The ultra-conservative Salafi branch of Islam has been spreading in Dagestan in recent years. This January, local authorities briefly shut down a Salafi mosque in the village of Shamkhal, near regional capital Makhachkala, and another Salafi mosque in Khasavyurt, Kavkasky Uzel reported.

Following protests by Salafi worshippers, the Khasavyurt mosque was reopened the day after its closure, and the Shamkal mosque has been run by a new imam since Feb. 2, Kavkasky Uzel reported.

The Islamic State is a terrorist organization banned in Russia.

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