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Rabbis to Teach Judaism in Moscow Jails

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Russian prisoners will now be able to study Judaism, as rabbis affiliated with the Federation of Jewish Communities of the CIS will soon give lectures on the faith at Moscow's Butyrka pretrial prison, media reported Friday.

While the Russian Orthodox Church is the dominant faith in the country, a seventh of the country's 142 million people are Muslims, and Jewish groups say there are about one million Jews.

"This new project clearly demonstrates the increase of cultural relations between the state and believers in Russia," said Rabbi Aaron Gurevich of the Jewish federation.

While a third of all Russian inmates are Muslim, it is not clear how many are Jewish.

A Muslim prayer room was opened at Butyrka almost two weeks ago, where the Orthodox Church has operated since 1989.

Russia's crowded, poorly managed prison system has come under increased scrutiny since the 2009 death of jailed lawyer Sergei Magnitsky. The Federal Prison Service says almost half of the inmates are ill, many infected with HIV or tuberculosis.

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