

Russian Orthodox Priest Suspected of Pedophilia, Detained in Israel

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A Russian Orthodox priest suspected of having committed acts of pedophilia at a children's summer camp last year has been detained in Israel, Interfax reported Monday.

Gleb Grozovsky, a priest from St. Petersburg, was placed on an international wanted list at Russia's request based on allegations of having sexually assaulted two girls, aged 9 and 12, at a religious-themed youth camp on the Greek island of Kos in 2013. He is also suspected of having committed "a range of similar crimes in St. Petersburg and the Leningrad Region" between 2011 and 2013, according to Russia's Investigative Committee.

Grozovsky left Russia for Israel on a business trip in the fall of 2013 before the Russian Investigative Committee launched a criminal case against him. His diocese in the Leningrad region terminated the mission in November of that year, but the priest failed to return to Russia.

Russia's General Prosecutor requested in April that the Israeli authorities extradite the 35-

year-old priest, whose arrest had been ordered in absentia. Grozovsky had reportedly attempted to acquire Israeli citizenship in an apparent bid to avoid facing justice in Russia.

If convicted and charged of being a first-time sex offender, Grozovsky could face up to 20 years in prison. Repeat sex offenders can face life in prison and chemical castration under current Russian law.

Grozovsky, a father of four, is a well-known figure in Russian Orthodox circles. He was considered the spiritual father of St. Petersburg's Zenit football team, although the club has denied any formal association with him.

Grozovsky has continued to assert his innocence. In April, the priest wrote on his page on VKontakte, Russia's most popular social media website, that he would return to the country "in the near future" to "defend his innocence."

A number of public figures have come out in Grozovsky's defense, expressing disbelief in the accusations made against him, including former football star Sergei Semak and rock singer Vyacheslav Butusov.

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