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Russian Orthodox Priest Detained For Trafficking Prostitutes

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Belarusian authorities have reportedly detained a Russian Orthodox Church priest for his alleged role in trafficking prostitutes to Russia with the aim of helping them kick-start their careers, the Lenta news agency reports.

Russian media outlet 47 news first reported on Saturday that a Russian Orthodox priest from the Peter and Paul Cathedral in Vitebsk had been detained for visiting prostitutes and arranging their transport to Russia.

A representative from the Belarus Investigative Committee said on Sunday that a human-trafficking case had been initiated against a detained 39-year-old man, which corresponds to the age of the detained priest.

In a conversation with Russian media outlet Lenta.ru, Vakhtang Kipshidze, the Head of Information Department for the Russian Orthodox Church said that as long as the case is ongoing the priest would be suspended from his church services.

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Kipshidze also said that, "If the accusations, despite their entirely unprecedented nature, are confirmed it would be preferable for [the Church] to extradite this clergyman to Russia in accordance with the Minsk Convention on Legal Assistance between the two countries."

In comments to Lenta.ru, Russian Orthodox Church representative Andrei Kuraev denied the accusations, saying that priests very rarely find themselves involved in criminal activities.

The Russian Orthodox Church has been implicated in several criminal cases over the past few years from icon theft to large scale corruption cases.

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