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Russia Probes Child Torture Reports at Seized Monastery

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Father Sergei Romanov (R). **Vladimir Podoksyonov / AP / TASS**

Russian investigators have opened a criminal case into the alleged torture of children living at a monastery in central Russia that has been under the control of an excommunicated, coronavirus-denying priest since June.

Dozens of children live in the Sredneuralsk women's monastery near Yekaterinburg, which was captured by its spiritual leader Father Sergei Romanov after he was banned from preaching over his refusal to follow coronavirus health guidelines. Media reports have detailed the alleged physical and psychological abuse of children at the monastery since it was founded in 2005.

The Sverdlovsk region Investigative Committee said Tuesday that it has opened a criminal case into the torture of children as well as into monastery officials' negligence.

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Priest

From 2004-2019, unidentified individuals “inflicted physical and mental suffering on seven children through systematic beatings and other violent acts” at the monastery, the Investigative Committee said.

It added that crimes against four children were the result of monastery officials’ failure to prevent these crimes.

Monastery officials have denied the reports of child abuse.

Father Sergei has been one of the loudest voices in the Russian Orthodox Church to speak out against coronavirus restrictions, calling the measures a “satanic plot” and alleging that the virus was manufactured to implant “surveillance chips” into the population. He was defrocked in July and an ecclesiastical court ruled to excommunicate him from the Church in September.

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