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Russia Jails 4 Crimean Tatars for Extremism

By AFP

August 16, 2021



Russian rights group Memorial described the defendants as "political prisoners." **crimean-solidarity.org**

Russia on Monday sentenced four Crimean Tatars to between 12 and 18 years in prison for taking part in a banned Islamic group, the defendants' lawyer said.

A military court in southern Russia "has carried out a guilty verdict," lawyer Ayder Azamatov told the Interfax news agency.

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The four Crimean Tatars — a predominantly Muslim ethnic minority that mostly opposed Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea from Ukraine — were accused of taking part in a "terrorist" group and attempting to overthrow government order.

The court in Rostov-on-Don sentenced Ruslan Mesutov and Lenur Khalilov to 18 years in

prison, Eldar Kantemirov to 12 years in jail, and Ruslan Nagaev to 13 years behind bars.

They were said to be part of the Hizb ut-Tahrir group — a pan-Islamist organization banned in Russia as terrorist but legal in Ukraine — the court ruled.

The Ukrainian parliament's rights ombudsman Lyudmila Denisova on Monday said she "condemned the illegal decision" of the Russian court.

"Russian prosecutors managed to illegally imprison Crimean Tatars for a crime they did not commit," she said on Facebook.

Russian rights group Memorial described the defendants as "political prisoners."

In January, three Crimean Tatars were handed between 13 and 18 years in jail on the same charges.

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