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Russia Jails Islamic Publisher for 17 Years on Terrorism Charges

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A Moscow court has sentenced the head of a prominent Islamic publishing house to 17 years in prison on charges of financing a terrorist organization, Russia's Investigative Committee said Friday.

Aslambek Ezhaev, 60, was found guilty of transferring more than 34 million rubles ($483,200) to people connected with the Islamic State terrorist group, including via his publishing house "Umma," which was one of the largest in Russia.

He denied the charges against him and asked his sons to defend his honor as the lengthy prison term would effectively be a life sentence for someone his age, according to his last word in court published by the SOTA Telegram channel.

Ezhaev was arrested in April 2021 following a search in his Moscow apartment where security forces claimed to have found "bank cards used for financing of terrorism," as well as "extremist literature and other extremist paraphernalia."

A month after his arrest, Ezhaev was added to the Russian government's list of designated "terrorists and extremists."

Several books published by Ezhaev's "Umma" were also designated as extremist materials. Among the banned works were classic works of Islamic scholarship such as Sahih al-Bukhari, a highly influential collection of hadiths compiled by Persian scholar Muhammad al-Bukhari, and the first volume of an interpretation of the Quran by Saudi Arabian scholar Abdul-Rahman al-Sa'di.

Many influential Islamic scholars and community figures, as well as human rights activists, have labeled the charges against Ezhaev as politically motivated.

Islamic State is a terrorist group banned in Russia.

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