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American Pastor Faces Deportation From Russia After Calling on Churchgoers to Pray for Donald Trump

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A court in Far East Russia's Kamchatka Peninsula has ordered the deportation of an American pastor after he was recorded leading a prayer for U.S. President Donald Trump, RFE/RL's Russian-language service reported Thursday.

Local law enforcement authorities accused Paul Guione of unlawful missionary work during a May 23 gathering at a church in the regional capital of Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky. He was fined 30,000 rubles ($400) and ordered to be deported on May 30.

Guione's defense attorney argued that the deportation order constituted excessive punishment since he has the financial means to leave Russia at his own expense and had already booked a flight out of the country for June 4.

Despite that argument, a court ruled to hold Guione in a detention center for foreigners

awaiting deportation until Aug. 27.

“[Guione] conducted religious talks, specifically giving a lecture on Jesus Christ, raising the topic of the importance of religion, teachings of the faith and the need to pray, including for the President of the United States,” the Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky City Court said in a press release.

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Guione, a father of eight, five of whom are Russian citizens, denied in court that he had committed any offense. He has reportedly visited Kamchatka nearly 60 times over the past three decades.

According to a court statement, the prayer session during which Guione called for churchgoers to pray for Trump was secretly recorded by an unidentified witness in the case against him, and the audio recording was submitted as evidence.

On June 8, the Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky City Court threw out the initial May 30 order to deport Guione due to procedural errors before reinstating it on June 12.

On Thursday, the court sent the case to a higher appellate judge after Guione’s defense team submitted its final appeal.

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