

## **Official position of the national Jehovah's Witnesses center about accusations of extremism**

HRWF (06.06.2016) – In a right to reply addressed to the online media Portal-credo.ru about accusations of extremism concerning a 77-year old Jehovah's Witness, the Administrative Center of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia clarified their situation as follows:

"Esteemed editors of Portal-credo.ru

In response to your article "77-year-old Jehovah's Witness in Sverdlovsk province suspected of extremism," we communicate the following:

In the course of several years now, Russian authorities have been mistakenly applying the law "On combating extremist activity" for restricting the peaceful activity of Jehovah's Witnesses. At the present time, more than 80 items published by Jehovah's Witnesses have been entered into the Federal List of Extremist Materials. Jehovah's Witnesses consider this a mistake and have sought in courts the exclusion of their books and brochures from this list. Nevertheless they do not import and do not distribute these publications. However despite this, law enforcement agencies of the RF mount ever more aggressive attempts to accuse a peaceful religious organization, officially registered in Russia, of "extremism."

In particular, law enforcement agencies actively employ falsified evidence (planted materials from the Federal List of Extremist Materials, testimony of false witnesses) in order to fine believers.

In the course of expert investigation, the Russian Ministry of Justice established that the religion of Jehovah's Witnesses does not represent any kind of danger or threat for public welfare. This has also been confirmed repeatedly by judicial decisions issued by the authoritative European Court for Human Rights. The word "Russia," which was incorporated in 1999 into the official name of the centralized religious organization of Jehovah's Witnesses, testifies according to law to the fact of the existence of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia for a term of more than 50 years. For a century, Jehovah's Witnesses in the territory of Russia have demonstrated their unconditional peace loving ways, refusing to cause harm to people even under threat of prison confinement.

From Valentina Kuznetsova, an elderly woman from the city of Serov, more than 870 publications, of which only 51 have been entered into the Federal List of Extremist Materials, were seized. In the main these were magazines composed of stitched and glued sheets from years ago, which Valentina has preserved in her home in her domestic library for personal use. Of course the woman was not even able to think about distributing publications in this form to anybody. Besides, Valentina has not been a member of the founders of the local religious organization (legal entity) of Jehovah's Witnesses of Serov for more than a year now, which is confirmed by documents.

Valentina explains: "As a believing person, I have collected biblical literature since 1992, well before the creation of the local religious organization, and after its registration in 1998 I continued to assemble my library without its (the organization's) participation. I kept the seized materials in a personal library in my apartment, that is, in a place to which access is available to an unrestricted circle of persons, without the aim of distribution, and in single copies. I have not taken them out of my home and I have not distributed them to anybody."

Attorney Vitaly Svintsov, who is conducting this case, commented on the situation thus: "The judges did not take into account the explanation of the Russian Ministry of Justice

that information in the Universal Registry of Legal Entities about 'founders' of a religious organization is entered only once and is not changed even in the event of the termination of their membership, since it pertains only to the moment of the creation of a noncommercial organization. In and of itself, membership in a religious organization cannot be viewed as evidence of committing civil violations of law, including the existence 'of goals of mass distribution,' while possessing extremist materials. Otherwise there occurs impermissible religious discrimination (article 19 of the constitution of the RF, article 14 of the above indicated convention, and article 26 of the above indicated international pact)."

With respect,

Press Service of the Administrative Center of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia"

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