

Pre-trial detention of Danish citizen Dennis Christensen extended until late November

HRWF (26.07.2017) – The district court of Orel has decided to extend by four months the pre-trial detention of Dennis Christensen, a Danish Jehovah's Witness arrested on 25 May while he was attending a religious meeting of his congregation. Noteworthy is the fact that very few media in Europe have covered this issue. European parliaments and major human rights organizations have failed to raise their voices for this prisoner of conscience, who is an EU citizen.

Washington has urged the Russian authorities to lift the ban on *Jehovah's Witnesses'* activities in Russia ruled by the Supreme Court on 20 April and confirmed on 17 July, to reverse the closing of the *Jehovah's Witnesses Administrative Center*, and to release any members of religious minorities that continue to be unjustly detained for so-called 'extremist' activities.

Almost 80% of Russians approve of Jehovah's Witnesses ban according to a recent poll by Levada Center. One in five (20%) heard nothing about the organization, according to the findings of a poll of 1,600 respondents in 137 Russian cities and towns on June 23-26. Thirteen per cent are aware of the Russian ban on JW; 34% heard something but no details; and 50% are unaware of the ban. Meanwhile, a majority (79%) approve of the court ban on JW; 12% disapprove; and one in ten (9%) could not answer. (Source: <http://interfax-religion.com/?act=news&div=13919>)

Let us not forget the famous statement of anti-nazi theologian and **pastor Martin Niemöller**:

First they came for the Communists, and I did not speak out
Because I was not a Communist
Then they came for the Socialists, and I did not speak out
Because I was not a Socialist
Then they came for the Trade Unionists, and I did not speak out
Because I was not a Trade Unionist
Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out
Because I was not a Jew
Then they came for me, and there was no one left to speak for me.

Similarly, we could say nowadays about prisoners in Russia:

They came for Tablighi Jamaat Muslims, and I did not speak out
Because I was not a Tablighi Jamaat Muslim

Then they came for Said Nursi followers, and I did not speak out

Then they came for Jehovah's Witnesses, and I did not speak out
Because I am not a Jehovah's Witness

Then they came for Scientologists, and I did not speak out
Because I am not a Scientologist

Then, they came for me, and there was no-one left to speak for me.

Sign our petition online for the release of Dennis Christensen, a Danish JW imprisoned since May in Russia: <http://bit.ly/2smGyAl>

See HRWF Database of religious prisoners in Russia at <http://hrwf.eu/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Russia-FBL-2017.pdf>

Danish Jehovah's Witness still in jail

JW in Russia (22.07.2017) - <https://www.jw-russia.org/news/17072223-197.html> - On 20 July 2017, by decision of the Soviet district court of the city of Orel, Danish citizen Dennis Christensen was left in an investigation cell for another 4 months, until 23 November. The court decided to extend his measure of restraint as a criminal who committed a "serious violation of law," despite the complete lack of evidence of a crime and of victims.

The court rejected all petitions of the defense, except for one—a public hearing. The judge did not consent to release the believer under house arrest with a bail of one million rubles, insisting that the peaceful believer should be isolated from society, although the investigation is still unable to explain what his crime consists of.

The investigation continues to mislead the court, maintaining that Christensen is the leader of the forbidden local religious organization of Jehovah's Witnesses in Orel. In reality, he never even was a part of this organization.

Numerous foreign observers were present in the courtroom, including the vice-consul of Denmark and representatives of news media of Denmark and Germany.

The believer's attorneys are preparing an appeal. (tr. by PDS, posted 24 July 2017)

Oryol Court extends imprisonment of Dennis Christensen

JW.ORG (24.07.2017) - <https://www.jw.org/en/news/legal/by-region/russia/court-extends-imprisonment-20170724> - On July 20, 2017, the Sovietskiy District Court of Oryol extended the pretrial detention of Dennis Christensen to November 23, 2017. Mr. Christensen, a Danish citizen and one of Jehovah's Witnesses, was arrested on May 25 when Federal Security Service agents, along with masked and armed police officers, raided a peaceful religious meeting that he was attending in Oryol.

His attorneys presented a motion for his release on bail and had made arrangements to cover the cost. Yet, the court refused to grant the motion in spite of the fact that he has no criminal record or history of violent behavior.

Mr. Christensen's extended detention comes on the heels of the July 17 Appellate Chamber decision of Russia's Supreme Court, which affirmed its earlier ruling to liquidate all of the Witnesses' legal entities and to ban their activity throughout the country. After more than a decade-long campaign to persecute the Witnesses and cast them as "extremists," Russian authorities have now succeeded in fabricating a legal veneer to criminalize their religious activities.

Commenting on the overall situation facing the Witnesses in Russia, Kate M. Byrnes, Chargé d'Affaires, a.i. of the U.S. Mission to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, stated: "We are alarmed by the July 17 Supreme Court verdict to uphold the ban of Jehovah's Witnesses' activities and the dissolution of the Jehovah's Witnesses Administrative Center and its 395 local religious organizations for supposed 'extremist activity.' It is abhorrent that the over 175,000 Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia may now face criminal prosecution for simply practicing their religion. The increasing application of legislation concerning 'extremism' to target wrongfully members of peaceful religious minority groups in Russia is troubling."