

# A Russian court grants parole to Jehovah's Witness Dennis Christensen

*Dennis Christensen has been on HRWF's database of FoRB prisoners since 2017. HRWF welcomes this decision as it has heavily campaigned for years for its release*

HRWF (24.06.2020) – On 23 June, the Lgovskiy District Court in the Kursk Region decided to grant early release to Danish Jehovah's Witness Dennis Christensen. The judge mitigated the remainder of Dennis' sentence to a fine of RUB 400,000 (about \$6,000). He will be released upon payment.

Christensen was already eligible for early release a year ago because of time served in pre-trial detention, but prison authorities rejected his previous requests.

Jarrood Lopes, spokesman for Jehovah's Witnesses, states: "Judge Galina Petlitsa's ruling is in line with last month's call by the U.N. Working Group on Arbitrary Detention's for Russia to immediately release all of Jehovah's Witnesses, especially considering the threat of COVID-19 in prison. We are pleased that Dennis may be going home to his wife, family, and friends in the coming weeks. However, it is unconscionable, after Dennis' harrowing experiences in prison, that he should have to pay a fine. Today's ruling also does not erase the fact that Dennis, a peaceful Christian believer, still has to bear the unjust stigma of being convicted as an extremist."

Dennis has spent over 3 years in prison since being arrested on 25 May 2017. For over a year now, Dennis has qualified to apply for early release from his six-year sentence. This is because he spent some two years in pretrial detention and, according to Russian law, pretrial detention is applied 1.5

times toward his sentence.

Dennis has applied for parole four times, but today was Dennis's first parole hearing. His first three requests were denied during the application process. Up until now, the prison administration has persisted in sabotaging Dennis' parole applications by falsely accusing him of misconduct. They even planted a knife in his cell.

Dennis' health has deteriorated during his imprisonment. He contracted pneumonia. Although he recovered, he is still suffering from a deteriorated immune system. According to his lawyer, Dennis' medical records were recently "lost," and prison authorities were using this as a pretext to discontinue his medical treatment.

### **Interview opportunities**

- Dennis' lawyer, Anton Bogdanov: [dbhukukcu@gmail.com](mailto:dbhukukcu@gmail.com); or call +7903-45-43-037
- Dennis' wife, Irina: +7 920 284-92-10 (via Telegram app)

Dennis is the first of 175 Jehovah's Witnesses who have spent time in prison or pretrial detention in modern Russia. See link to [infographic](#).

### **Nationwide Persecution (Russia and Crimea)**

**353** under criminal investigation

**34** in prison (10 convicted; 24 pretrial detention)

**24** under house arrest

**970** homes raided since 2017 Supreme Court ruling (170 raided in 2020—even during the COVID-19 pandemic)

Source: Jarrod Lopes, Communications Officer and Spokesman, Office of Public Information, World Headquarters of Jehovah's Witnesses.

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