

Belarus: Demand to suspend activity of Jehovah's Witnesses arises in Belarus

Russia Religious News (19.03.2018) – <http://bit.ly/2psLTHa> – A petition to the commissioner for affairs of religions and nationalities in Belarus, Leonid Gulyako, with a demand to conduct a state religious studies expert analysis of the teachings of Jehovah's Witnesses, has appeared on the website change.org. Its author is indicated to be a certain Maksim Arsentiev.

According to the petition, the Jehovah's Witnesses in Belarus have not undergone a religious studies expert analysis of their doctrines, which is required for state registration of religious organizations or associations. "Until the time of receiving the results of an expert analysis regarding said organization, we demand the suspension of the activity of all local religious organizations and the religious association of Jehovah's Witnesses of Belarus and the issuance of a prohibition on illegal recruitment activity and distribution of religious literature," the authors declare.

At the same time, they cite the experience of Russia where the activity of Jehovah's Witnesses was recently prohibited. "We all, as citizens of our country, cannot tolerate illegal propaganda work on the territory of our motherland attracting adherents of a religious organization whose doctrine and ideology have never been examined in detail by recognized experts and scholars (just who is not specified—Krynica.info) looking for its danger for the physical and psychological health of citizens of the republic of Belarus, and also for

their social life," the petition says.

It is also reported that last summer activists sent to the office of the commissioner for affairs of religions and nationalities a letter with a demand to conduct a state expert analysis of Jehovah's Witnesses in connection with their conduct of an annual congress on the territory of Belarus. At the time, it was indicated that there is no basis for an expert analysis inasmuch as the planning of the Jehovah's Witnesses' congress was conducted legally.

One of their believers, the blogger Anton Chivchalov, commented for Krynica.info about another attempt to forbid the activity of Jehovah's Witnesses.

"The Jehovah's Witnesses are active officially and legally in all countries of the European Union, and they were registered in the republic of Belarus in 1994. In all these years they have cooperated closely with the authorities of the country at all levels. For example, all literature imported into the country undergoes required government censorship. The religious association of Jehovah's Witnesses in the republic of Belarus conscientiously pays all taxes and fees. Anybody who wishes may attend any event of the Jehovah's Witnesses and be persuaded that these are peaceful, law-abiding people. This is known by both Belorussian and Russian experts. Unfortunately, the authorities of the Russian federation have decided to follow the path of North Korea, Afghanistan, and several other countries, in which freedom of religious confession is severely restricted. The April decision of the Russian Supreme Court has already been accepted for review by the European Court of Human Rights. I would like to believe that Belarus will not want to step on the same rake, but will

continue to respect the rights and liberties of its own citizens as is customary in Europe and generally in the civilized world," the interlocutor declared.

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