

RUSSIA: CASE AGAINST THE BIBLE OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES RESUMES FRIDAY

JW Headquarters New York (26.07.2017) – On Friday, July 28, 2017, the Vyborg City Court, 138 kilometers (85 mi.) northwest of St. Petersburg, will resume hearings in the case against the New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures (NWT), a Bible published by Jehovah's Witnesses. Russian authorities are seeking to ban this Bible, as "extremist," despite an amendment to Article 3 of the Federal Law on Extremism signed by President Putin in the fall of 2015. The amendment states: "The Bible, the Quran, the Tanakh, and the Kangyur, and their contents, and quotations from them cannot be recognized as extremist materials." The prosecution's case is largely based on attempting to prove the NWT is not a Bible.

The case has been suspended since April 26, 2016, pending a court-appointed analysis of the NWT by the Center for Sociocultural Expert Studies. This week the court received the completed analysis (some 100 pages in length) and has scheduled the hearing to resume on Friday. A copy of the document shows that the 'expert' analysis concluded that the NWT is "not a Bible." The apparent basis for such a conclusion is that the publication refers to itself as the "Holy Scriptures." (See <http://bit.ly/2u1kBag> for a preliminary English translation of the analysis, along with the original in Russian).

This is not the first time the Center for Sociocultural Expert Studies has analyzed the NWT. Their conclusions about the NWT served as the basis for the prosecutor's original claim. This in itself is a violation of a precedent set by Russia's

Supreme Court disqualifying an expert from being used twice in the same case to address the same question.

According to Roman Lunkin, leading research fellow of the Center for Religion and Society Studies at the Russian Academy of Sciences' Institute of Europe, none of the experts at the center has a degree in religious studies and they are unfamiliar with the writings of Jehovah's Witnesses in general. Mr. Lunkin states: "In defiance of all good sense, Russia's law-enforcement system generates completely ridiculous expert studies (and, it appears, they encourage loyal supporters to open expert centers)." Other noted scholars have likewise expressed surprise (see <http://bit.ly/2h4GN1W>) at the extent to which Russia is willing to go to ban any publications produced or distributed by Jehovah's Witnesses.