

RUSSIA: Dennis Christensen found guilty – verdict to be appealed



Dennis Christensen. Photo: Simon Kruse / Berlingske

Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia (06.02.2019) – <https://bit.ly/2Bm4VoG> – On February 6, 2019, Judge Aleksei Rudnev of the Zheleznodorozhniy District Court of Oryol, announced the verdict in the case of Dennis Christensen. Dennis Christensen was found guilty under Article 282.2 (1) of the criminal code for “organising the activity of an extremist organization.” He has been sentenced to 6 years in prison.

The decision has not entered into force. His lawyers believe the verdict is unreasonable and will be appealing the decision. Meanwhile, Dennis Christensen will remain in Detention Facility No. 1 in the Oryol Region, where he has

already spent 622 days. He is able to receive letters of support.

“We deeply regret the conviction of Dennis Christensen,” said Yaroslav Sivulsky, a representative of the European Association of Jehovah’s Witnesses. “An innocent man who did not commit any real crime was convicted. It is sad that reading the Bible, preaching, and living a moral way of life is again a criminal offense in Russia.”

Additional comment: Paul Gillies, International Spokesman for Jehovah’s Witnesses

“Everyone acquainted with Dennis Christensen knows that he has committed no crime. He received a six-year prison sentence merely for practicing his Christian faith. This verdict reveals just how fragile religious freedom has become in Russia. Jehovah’s Witnesses will continue to appeal for justice while supporting their fellow worshippers.”

HRWF Comments

1. In 2018, Dennis Christensen was adopted as a prisoner of conscience by the US Commission on International Freedom (USCIRF)
2. HRWF Database of FORB Prisoners contains documented cases of 29 JW who were in prison last year. Some were afterwards put under house arrest but most of them are still detained. However, Russia is only ranked 41th on Open Doors 2019 World Watch List

(<https://www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/world-watch-list/russian-federation/>)

– See as well Aid to the Church in Need 2018 Religious Freedom Report on Russia: <https://religious-freedom-report.org/report/?report=790>

– HRWF Database of FORB Prisoners also contains 7 cases of Said Nursi Followers (Muslim) and 4 cases of Tabligh Jamaat Muslims.

– In all, about 40 peaceful believers were in prison in Russia in 2018.

3. Six-year prison term. His pretrial detention will be calculated 1.5x toward the sentence. Dennis Christensen will appeal the decision.

Case of Christensen in Oryol

Region: Oryol Region

Locality: Oryol

Case number: 11707540001500164

Number of the case in court: 1-37/1

Current stage: trial in court of first instance

Suspected of: according to the investigation, together with the others he conducted religious services, which is interpreted as “organising the activity of an extremist organisation” (with reference to the court’s decision on the liquidation of the local organisation of Jehovah’s Witnesses)

Article of the Russian Criminal Code: 282.2(1)

Case initiated: 23 May 2017

Investigating: Investigative Department of the Directorate of

the FSB of Russia for the Oryol Region

Considering on the merits: Zheleznodorozhnyy District Court of the City of Oryol

Judge: Aleksei Nikolaevich Rudnev

Prisoner of Conscience:
Dennis Christensen
February 6, 2019

Family and background
Born in Copenhagen in 1972. Parents are Jehovah's Witnesses. Baptized in 1989 as one of Jehovah's Witnesses.

Current location
In custody at Detention Center No. 1, ul. Krasnoarmeyskaya, 10, g. Oryol, 302040. He is able to receive letters of support.

Education
In 1991, completed courses in carpentry. In 1993, received a diploma in construction at a trade school in the city of Haslev, Denmark. Since age 19, lived independently from his parents.

Active community life
Christensens helped improve the children's playground near their home, although they do not have children. Together with fellow believers, they participated in the neighborhood clean-up each year.

Move to Russia
In 1995, arrived in St. Petersburg. Volunteered to construct buildings for use by Jehovah's Witnesses in the town of Solnechnoye. In 1999, moved to the city of Murmansk.

Life in Oryol since 2006

Case

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