

# Russia: Jehovah's Witnesses make an interim summary of persecution in 2019

*What has changed in Russia's religious life after sentencing of Dennis Christensen?*

JW Russia (12.05.2019) – <https://bit.ly/30khRWG> – A genuine explosion of arrests for the faith began after a court sentenced a Jehovah's Witness to imprisonment for the first time in modern Russia. The sentence was issued by a district court of Orel on 6 February 2019. In the following three months, in 25 Russian cities, similar cases were opened (in 20 regions of Russia) and 74 believers were indicted or suspected, of whom 29 were put behind bars (some of the measures of restriction were later mitigated). One hundred forty-one families of believers were subjected to search in their own residence. At least seven believers complained of torture, including the use of electronic shock devices.

Arrests, searches, and interrogations in the past three months occurred in the following chronological order:

6 February: Saransk, Urai (Khanty-Mansi autonomous oblast), Berezovskii (Kemerovo oblast);

15 February: Surgut (Khanty-Mansi autonomous oblast);

19 February: Arkhangelsk;

25 February: Kurilsk (Sakhalin oblast);

27 February: Ulianovsk;  
28 February: Nefteyugansk (Khanty-Mansi autonomous oblast);  
13 March: Severodvinsk (Arkhangelsk oblast);  
17 March: Luchegorsk (Primorie territory);  
20 March: Magadan, Yalta (Crimea);  
21 March: Zeya (Amur oblast);  
26 March: Kirov, Cheliabinsk;  
3 April: Porkhov (Pskov oblast);  
10 April: Abakan;  
16 April: Karpinsk (Sverdlovsk oblast);  
19 April: Minusinsk (Krasnoyarsk territory), Sharypovo (Krasnoyarsk territory), Partizansk (Primorie territory), Novosibirsk;  
22 April: Inozemtsevo (Stavropol territory);  
25 April: Smolensk;  
29 April: Dagomys (Krasnodar territory).

“The sentencing of Dennis Christensen evoked an international resonance and called attention to the illegitimacy of the brutal persecution of Jehovah’s Witnesses on the part of the state,” notes Yaroslav Sivulsky of the European Association of Jehovah’s Witnesses. “It is possible that we have observed the last desperate attempt to yet find something illegal in the activity of the Jehovah’s Witnesses. However our believers are as far from extremism as heaven is from earth.”

Meanwhile, raids have continued. On 8 May 2019, in Omsk, about five new searches occurred in homes of Jehovah's Witnesses. The total number of Russians subjected to criminal prosecution for their faith is 188 persons.

Law enforcement personnel erroneously take the religious profession of citizens as participation in the activity of an extremist organizations. This problem has received the attention of prominent public figures of Russia, the Council on Human Rights under the president of the RF, the president of the RF, and also international organizations—the Foreign Policy Service of the European Union, observers at the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, and the office of the United Nations high commissioner for human rights. Jehovah's Witnesses have nothing at all to do with extremism and they insist on their own complete innocence. The government of Russia has often declared that the decisions of the Russian courts for the liquidation and ban of organizations of Jehovah's Witnesses "do not make an assessment of the religious teachings of Jehovah's Witnesses and they do not contain a restriction or a ban on the profession of the aforementioned teaching individually." (tr. by PDS, posted 13 May 2019, <https://www2.stetson.edu/~psteeves/relnews/>)

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