

RUSSIA: Vladimir Putin has declared war on Jehovah's Witnesses

HRWF (17.10.2016) – It is obvious that Vladimir Putin has declared war on Jehovah's Witnesses, and non-Orthodox minorities in general. Both the police and the judiciary have been harassing them for months and years all over Russia. The fear is growing that all their activities may be forbidden in Russia. They seem to be a priority target. JW are the most resistant minority in the country. Fortunately, they can rely on a team of lawyers who defend their rights tooth and nail. For how long?

If they are banned one day, it will be easy for Moscow to crush all the other religious minorities whose defence means are much more limited.

Russian Supreme Court to announce ruling on appeal filed by Jehovah Witness' branch

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RAPSI (14.10.2016) – <http://bit.ly/2dl1Nu9> – On October 18, Russia's Supreme Court will announce its ruling on the appeal filed over the liquidation of local Jehovah's Witness organization in Oryol.

On June 14, the Oryol Regional Court liquidated the organization on request of the Ministry of Justice's regional Directorate. The organization was previously found extremist.

Representative of the Jehovah's Witnesses noted that no

violations were found during the inspection conducted by the Ministry of Justice on April 1, 2013.

Russian court bans Jehovah's Witnesses branch in Jewish Autonomous Region

RAPSI (12.10.2016) – <http://bit.ly/2dUdgni> – On October 12, a court in the Jewish Autonomous Region has ruled to ban a branch of “The Jehovah’s Witnesses” in Birobidzhan because of distributing extremist literature by the organization, according to the court’s website.

A lawsuit seeking prohibition of the local religious organization “The Jehovah’s Witnesses” has been filed by the Main Department of the Ministry of Justice of the Khabarovsk Krai and Jewish Autonomous Region.

According to the Ministry, facts of keeping and distribution of extremist materials were revealed in 2015 and 2016. Leaders of “The Jehovah’s Witnesses” were held administratively liable; the organization was formally noticed about inadmissibility of carrying out extremist activity.

The defendant’s representative, committee chairman of “The Jehovah’s Witnesses” in Birobidzhan, has not admitted plaintiff’s claim.

The ruling may be appealed in the Supreme Court of Russia.

Administrative case against the community of the Jehovah's Witnesses in Chapaevsk

SOVA (12.10.2016) – <http://bit.ly/2eGAEHo> – In the Samara region, a case (Art. 20,29 of the Administrative Code For Possession of Forbidden Pamphlets) has been drawn up against the Jehovah's Witnesses of Chapaevsk.

On October 12th, 2016, it became known that Chapaevsk city court is currently working on an administrative case against the local religious organization of the Jehovah's Witnesses according to the case number Art. 20, 29 of the administrative code for "possession of extremist materials with the intention to distribute".

The reason for this taking place is that within the community meeting house, there were found forbidden books and pamphlets. Members of the congregation declared that those materials were planted. On September 30th, 2016, a case was drawn up against the Jehovah's Witness organization on the basis of administrative violations. Also, in May 2016, the community received a warning from the prosecutors regarding the inadmissibility of extremist activity of which the Jehovah's Witness church was not permitted to challenge in a court of law. If their organization were to be penalized, they could possibly face liquidation for violation of the law given upon their receiving the warning.

We want to remind you that we view the liquidation of the organization of the Jehovah's Witnesses as a form of extremism

from the government. Persecution towards the members and their community as well as the banning of their religious texts are forms of religious discrimination.

(Translation Russian-English by HRWF)

Administrative Center of Jehovah's Witnesses were not permitted to appeal against the Prosecutor General's warning

SOVA (12.10.2016) – <http://bit.ly/2ecCFaS> – The Tver court of Moscow dismissed the appeal of the Jehovah's Witnesses regarding the warning issued them concerning the inadmissibility of their extremist activity.

On October 12th, 2016, the Tverskoy district court of Moscow rejected Jehovah's Witnesses claim to invalidate the warning that was issued them by the Russian Prosecutor General's office which had been addressed to the Jehovah's Witness Administrative Center in Russia.

We want to remind you that the warning directed to the Administrative Center of the Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia was issued on March 2nd, 2016, by the Russian Deputy Prosecutor General "Viktor Grin". On April 29th, 2016, the Jehovah's Witness organization filed a complaint to the attorney general but did not receive any answer for a month.

Witnesses pointed out that the prosecutor's warning contains significant legal controversies. In particular, it appeared

that 88 Jehovah's witness publications were recognized as extremist by the Russian Courts. However, the prosecution authorities, who themselves had initiated the recognition of these materials as extremist never claimed the Jehovah's Witness administrative center in Russia as an interested party in court and has consistently opposed their participation in the process of court. According to the federal law on "counteracting extremist activity" if the court will not recognize the warning as illegal, and the prosecutor's office claims will not be removed, or if the activities of the Jehovah's Witness administrative center will show new signs of extremist activity, their organization will be subject to liquidation.

(Translation Russian-English by HRWF)

In Saint Petersburg, police officers disturbed religious service of Jehovah's Witnesses: 14 people were detained

SOVA (12.10.2016) – <http://bit.ly/2dl0CuM> – In the Kalinin District of St. Petersburg, police officers disrupted a Jehovah's Witness worship service and detained fourteen people.

On October 11th, 2016, police officers disrupted the worship service at Kingdom Hall in the Kalinin district of St. Petersburg. After the service, the police questioned members of the community, including minors. Passport information was copied, phones, tablets and other electronic devices were seized, and all men as well as some of the women were taken into custody and detained at the police station. In total, fourteen individuals were detained for further questioning.

Some of the believers told reporters that they were not aware of the reasons for the raid and were not shown any documents justifying the police and their actions.

According to the press service for the Jehovah's Witnesses Administrative Center, not only electronics had been confiscated but also Bibles. Police raided the premises, even cracking open the ceilings to check for banned materials. Witnesses state that the police taped over surveillance cameras that were placed in the building by the Jehovah's Witness organization for security measures. During this ordeal, all believers in the meeting house were not permitted to make any phone calls.

(Translation Russian-English by HRWF)

Jehovah's Witnesses have had many legal problems in Russia

HRWF (17.10.2017) – On June 16, Russia's Supreme Court declared "The Jehovah's Witnesses of Stary Oskol" in the Belgorod Region an extremist organization and ruled to liquidate it.

On June 9, the Jehovah's Witnesses of Belgorod was banned as extremist organization.

In March 2015, a court in Tyumen fined the organization 50,000 rubles (\$800) and seized prohibited literature.

In January 2014, a court in Kurgan ruled to ban the organization's booklets as extremist. The books talk about how to have a happy life, what you can hope for, how to develop good relations with God and what you should know about God and its meaning.

In late December 2013, the leader of the sect's group in Tobolsk, Siberia was charged with extremism and the prevention of a blood transfusion that nearly led to the death of a female member of the group.

In 2004, a court in Moscow dissolved and banned a Jehovah's Witnesses group on charges of recruiting children, encouraging believers to break from their families, inciting suicide and preventing believers from accepting medical assistance.

Jehovah's Witnesses is an international religious organization based in Brooklyn, New York. Since 2004 sever branches and chapters of the organization were banned and shut down in various regions of Russia.