

# **RUSSIA/GEORGIA: Occupied S. Ossetia bans Jehovah's Witnesses as 'extremist'**

By Thea Morrison

Georgia Today (17.10.2017) – <http://bit.ly/2h0ns27> – Georgia's Russian-occupied region of South Ossetia has banned religious group Jehovah's Witnesses as an extremist organization, also officially declaring their activities as illegal.

The information was spread on October 17 by Sputnik-Ossetia.

The so called Supreme Court of de facto South Ossetia satisfied the lawsuit of the so called Prosecutor General's Office about the ban on the activity of the religious association Jehovah's Witnesses and its recognition as extremist on the territory of the "republic", de facto Justice Minister Zalina Lalieva told Sputnik.

On October 17 the court verdict went into force, which means that the religious organization has been banned in the occupied region.

Zalina Lalieva did not specify exactly how many members of Jehovah's Witnesses are there in the region, however she added that they are more than a thousand.

"In the republic there is only one religious organization registered in the Ministry of Justice – the Alan Diocese," she added, without specifying what punishment awaits the Jehovah's Witnesses' members if they still continue their activities.

It should be noted that in August 2017 Russian Federation also banned Jehovah's Witnesses administrative center in Russia and its 395 local branches.

The move was based on an April supreme court decision that declared Jehovah's Witnesses an extremist organization and ordered its property to be turned over to the state.

United Nations human rights experts said the court case against Jehovah's Witnesses "signals a dark future for all religious freedom in Russia."

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