

# **RUSSIA: Dennis Christensen behind bars for 6 years: Outcry of the international community**

*Human Rights Without Frontiers calls upon the European Parliament to adopt a resolution denouncing the egregious violations of religious freedom in Russia and to ask for the release of Dennis Christensen*

HRWF (11.02.2019) – HRWF joins the US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), the Council of Europe (CoE) and the European Union in demanding Mr Christensen to be released immediately and unconditionally.

Additionally, HRWF urges the European Parliament to adopt a resolution denouncing the egregious violations of religious freedom in Russia.

*Council of Europe: Russia monitors express concern at sentencing of Jehovah's Witness for 'extremism'*

CoE (07.02.2019) -The co-rapporteurs of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) for the monitoring of Russia, Telmo Correia (Portugal, EPP/CD) and Angela Smith (United Kingdom, SOC), have expressed serious concern at the conviction and sentencing to six years imprisonment, by the Zheleznodorozhniy District Court, of Dennis Christensen for

“organising the activity of an extremist organisation” on the grounds that he is a practising Jehovah’s Witness.

“Mr Christensen’s conviction and imprisonment for nothing more than peacefully practising his faith is an unacceptable violation of the right to freedom of religion,” said the co-rapporteurs. They emphasised that the European Court of Human Rights has already, on previous occasions, ruled in favour of Jehovah’s Witnesses’ right to worship without interference from the Russian authorities.

In addition, the co-rapporteurs reiterated concerns expressed by PACE about the abuse and arbitrary application of the so-called “extremism law” by the Russian authorities. They expressed their hope that Mr Christensen’s conviction would be overturned without delay by the appeals court and called on the Russian authorities to release him pending an appeal.

Source:

<http://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/News/News-View-EN.asp?newsid=7366&lang=2&cat=3>

***European Union: Statement by the Spokesperson of Federica Mogherini on the sentencing of Dennis Christensen***

EEAS (06.02.2019) – Today, a Russian court in the city of Oryol sentenced Mr Dennis Christensen, a Danish citizen, to 6 years of imprisonment.

Mr Christensen was arrested in 2017 when Federal Security

Service agents raided a peaceful religious meeting of Jehovah's Witnesses in Oryol. He has been convicted on grounds of 'organising extremist activity', which amounts to exercising his right to freedom of religion as a Jehovah's Witness. A number of other criminal cases against Jehovah's Witnesses are also currently pending. No one should be imprisoned for peaceful acts of worship in the expression of their religious beliefs.

The European Union expects Mr Christensen to be released immediately and unconditionally. Jehovah's Witnesses, as with all other religious groups, must be able to peacefully enjoy freedom of assembly without interference, as guaranteed by the Constitution of the Russian Federation, as well as by Russia's international commitments and international human rights standards.

Source:

[https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/57728/statement-spokesperson-sentencing-dennis-christensen-russia\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/57728/statement-spokesperson-sentencing-dennis-christensen-russia_en)

***USA: USCIRF condemns Russian conviction of Danish prisoner of conscience Dennis Christensen***



USCIRF (07.02.2019) – Kristina Arriaga, Vice Chair of the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), today condemned the decision by a Russian court to convict and sentence Dennis Christensen, a Jehovah’s Witness, to six years imprisonment on charges of “organizing the activity of an extremist organization.

*“Dennis Christensen’s conviction represents the continued deterioration of religious freedom in Putin’s Russia,”* said Arriaga, who advocates on behalf of Mr. Christensen as part of USCIRF’s Religious Prisoners of Conscience Project. *“Evidently, it’s not enough for the state to brand peaceful groups like the Jehovah’s Witnesses ‘extremist’; it must also imprison their members. Russia must enter the 21st century and respect religious freedom as a fundamental human right.”*

In June 2016, following a trend of repression of religious minority communities throughout Russia, a regional court in

Oryol, where Mr. Christensen resides, branded the local Jehovah's Witnesses branch an "extremist" group. On May 25, 2017, state security forces disrupted a Jehovah's Witness prayer service, detaining some 70-80 people for several hours and arresting Mr. Christensen, alongside 15 Russian citizens. Mr. Christensen had appeared in court more than 50 times before being convicted on February 6. He has already spent more than 622 days in Detention Facility No. 1 in the Oryol Region.

In 2018, USCIRF again recommended that Russia be designated a "country of particular concern" (CPC) under the International Religious Freedom Act. In November 2018, the U.S. State Department placed Russia on a Special Watch list for "engaging in or tolerating severe violations of religious freedom."

Source:

<https://www.uscirf.gov/news-room/press-releases-statements/uscirf-condemns-russian-conviction-danish-prisoner-conscience>

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)
- 7 cases of Said Nursi Followers (Muslim) and 4 cases of Tabligh Jamaat Muslims
- 5 Scientologists

In all, more than 40 peaceful believers were in prison in Russia in 2018.

In 2018, Russia was in Tier 1 of HRWF Database of FORB prisoners of conscience per country (<https://hrwf.eu/forb/forb-and-blasphemy-prisoners-list/>) \*

*(\*) Tier 1 (over 40 prisoners): China, Eritrea, Iran, Kazakhstan, North Korea, Pakistan, Russia, South Korea, Uzbekistan, Vietnam*

*Tier 2 (10-40 prisoners): Egypt, Indonesia, Singapore, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan*

*Tier 3 (under 10 prisoners): Algeria, Azerbaijan, Ethiopia, India, Kyrgyzstan, Nepal, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Yemen*

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# **RUSSIA: BBC features case of Danish Jehovah's Witness**

*Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia: how Dennis Christensen became an Orel extremist*

By Viktor Nekhezin

Russia Religion News (23.01.2019) – <https://bit.ly/2FJzbgV> – [...] At seven o'clock in the evening of 25 May 2017, during a Saturday worship service at building 50 on Zheleznodorozhny St. in Orel, a squad of OMON troops led by agents of the F.S.B. burst into the Kingdom Hall (as Jehovah's Witnesses call their houses of worship). A search was conducted in the building, which lasted until 5:00 in the morning of the next day.

Of 100 persons who were at the worship service, only Dennis Christensen was arrested. He was informed that a criminal case of extremism had been opened against him. Since that time, the Dane has been in pretrial detention.

He himself calls the accusation against him absurd. "To call me or other peaceful Jehovah's Witnesses extremists is the greatest stupidity that I have ever heard!" the Dane says in amazement.

An "excerpt from the order regarding the defendant of 15 November 2017" says that "Christensen, Dennis Ole, committed an intentional crime against the foundation of the constitutional structure and the security of the state." In the opinion of the investigator, Christensen, while being "the effective leader of the local religious organization of Jehovah's Witnesses of Orel, undertook aggressive actions of an organizational nature directed to the continuation of the illegal activity of the local religious organization of Jehovah's Witnesses of Orel."

The list of charges against Dennis Ole Christensen includes:

- he agreed and coordinated his actions as leader of the local religious organization of Jehovah's Witnesses of Orel with the forbidden "Administrative Center of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia;"
- he received from the "Administrative Center" religious literature with extremist contents and also forms for registering refusal of medical intervention (blood transfusion);
- he engaged three Russian citizens in the administration of the local religious organization of Jehovah's Witnesses of Orel (a criminal case against them was made into a separate trial and all three left Russia, along with their families, in 2017);
- he disposed of property of the local religious organization of Jehovah's Witnesses of Orel, by controlling the receipt and disbursement of funds;
- he organized the collection of funds from members of the local religious organization of Jehovah's Witnesses of Orel and directed their transfer to the account of the



- forbidden “Administrative Center;”
- “he continued the use of the building at the address of 50 Zheleznodorozhny St., Orel” as the premises for worship services and directed the payment of utilities for this building;
  - “he adopted measures of conspiracy for hiding the activity of the local religious organization of Jehovah’s Witnesses of Orel;
  - he organized the storage of financial documents and religious literature “in electronic form and remote access;”
  - “using his authority as a spiritual leader,” he independently made decisions about receiving new members into the local religious organization of Jehovah’s Witnesses of Orel;
  - “he was the initiator and he exercised primacy in determining the course of worship services,” in which persons who are not adherents of the religious teaching of Jehovah’s Witnesses and also state agencies and bodies of local administration are evaluated negatively.

At the same time, Dennis Christensen was not even an official member of the Orel local religious organization. “He was never in this local religious organization at all and he could not be by law. Can you imagine? Because he is a foreigner. And the charter of the local religious organization stipulates that only citizens of Russia may be members of the local religious organization. Of course, this is nonsense, but what is to be done,” explains Irina [Christensen’s wife].

Her words are confirmed by Christensen’s lawyer, Anton Bogdanov: the defense examined the documents of the local religious organization and did not find a single mention of Dennis Christensen. “Even the prosecution does not challenge

this,” Bogdanov emphasizes. “They say that he was the ‘effective director.’ Although the facts say otherwise.”

According to the logic of the prosecution, the attorney says, it turns out that after the liquidation by the court of the local religious organization of Jehovah’s Witnesses of Orel, the adherents of this religion in principle did not have the right to conduct worship services: “Their position comes down to this, that once the court liquidated the legal entity, then people cannot assemble together, read the Bible, pray, or sing religious songs.”

But this contradicts the decision of the Supreme Court, the attorney avers. “There is the appellate determination of the Russian Supreme Court on this case regarding the liquidation of the local religious organization of Jehovah’s Witnesses of Orel—that after this liquidation, people professing the religion of Jehovah’s Witnesses have the right to profess their religion afterward and to conduct their rituals,” Anton Bogdanov recalls.

### ***Complete Surprise***

The local religious organization of Jehovah’s Witnesses in Orel was liquidated in July 2016; in October of the same year this court decision took legal effect, but both before and after this the Orel Jehovahists continued to gather twice a week in their Kingdom Hall on Zheleznodorozhny. Irina Christensen said that she and her husband did not have any premonitions or fears. Dennis’ arrest at the end of May 2017 was a complete surprise for them.

The prosecutors presented their evidence in court for almost six months, but, as Anton Bogdanov notes, the foundation of the accusation was audio and video recordings made with the help of a hidden camera of two services in February 2017. The recordings were made by an agent who was inserted into the congregation, who spoke in court as a secret witness under the pseudonym "Aleksei Ermolov."

"This is a person we know. He is a teacher of the Orel State University, and he filmed everything that was happening," the attorney explains. The identity of the secret witness became known to participants in the trial and journalists, but he himself refused to talk with the press.

***Attorney Bogdanov doubts that it is possible to find any signs of extremism in the recordings made by "Aleksei Ermolov"***

"These are ordinary conversations about religion. That God will destroy dishonest people—this is a quotation from the Bible. That people who will be righteous will live forever. Not Jehovah's Witnesses, but people who will be righteous, they will live forever. That it is necessary to develop in one's self meekness, self-control, patience, and love, and to relate to people peacefully no matter how they treat us. These are quotations of phrases that were spoken in the service," Bogdanov cites examples.

The attorney insists that in the case there is no criminal event.

In court the secret witness repeated two of the most common accusations against Jehovah's Witnesses: that they break up families and pose a threat to their own life by refusing blood transfusion. But the witness replied to clarifying question of the defense that he knew about this "from the internet."

"Cite facts: whose family was broken up, who died without blood, what else? I know of no incidents in Orel. It is very superficial. A lot of dirt, few facts. More subjective evaluation," Bogdanov summed up the statements of the secret witness.

Several court sessions were devoted to wiretaps of Christensen's telephone conversations with his fellow believers. Attorney Bogdanov thinks that the court did not hear anything that incriminates his client. Even the opposite: without knowing about the wiretap, in one of the conversations Christensen himself says to his interlocutor: "We are not a local religious organization; we are simply a religious group, ordinary believing people." In the opinion of Anton Bogdanov, this proves the absence of any connections of Christensen with the forbidden organization.

During searches in the house of worship and in the apartment, a lot of religious literature was seized from Christensen, but the investigators did not manage to find there anything that is extremist. "There is not anything here," Bogdanov summarizes the evidence of the prosecution.

***General flow***

Dennis Christensen admits that he was an elder, one of several in their congregation (usually in each congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses there are five or six elders). "But this does not make me the leader of the congregation," he insists. "Jesus said in Matthew 23.8, 'You all are brothers.' I am a Christian brother, the same as all the rest, and we are equal before God."

Attorney Anton Bogdanov thinks that the prosecution does not have weighty evidence that it was Dennis Christensen who was the organizer of the worship services and generally the head of the Orel congregation. In the video recordings of meetings it is evident that the leader of the meetings was another person, and Christensen was only one of the speakers.

Bogdanov says that there was no need to organize anything: in a brochure published centrally for Jehovah's Witnesses throughout the world and not banned in Russia there is a schedule with clear instructions when to read which excerpts from the Bible, what questions to discuss, and what songs to sing. "This is the general flow of the world religious confession of Jehovah's Witnesses. And the witnesses who were questioned said: we do not need for anyone to come and say: 'So, I am your organizer; today we are reading this, and tomorrow that,' everything is clear here."

### ***On a cost-free basis***

In the attorney's opinion, the other points of the indictment are also similarly insubstantial. For example, that it was

Christensen who was responsible for the use of the premises where the worship services were held. The building at 50 Zheleznodorozhny, where the Orel Jehovah's Witnesses made their Kingdom Hall, is owned by a private individual who resides in Moscow and provides the building for use by the Jehovah's Witnesses at no cost. Anton Bogdanov supposes that the owner is a Jehovah's Witness himself and his testimony is in the materials of the case. There was no rental agreement.

And Bogdanov emphasizes, there were three congregations of Jehovahists in all in Orel. "Consequently, this building was attended not only by the group Christensen was in but also was used by other people," the attorney points out.

After Christensen's arrest, his fellow believers ceased using the building at 50 Zheleznodorozhny and now their meetings are conducted in apartments in various districts of Orel.

### ***Second round of repressions***

Despite nearly a year and a half spent in prison, Dennis Christensen, as previously, does not regret that he moved to live in Russia. "It is one of the best decisions that I have made in my life, and it brought me much happiness," he thinks.

His wife says that they feel the support and aid not only from fellow believers and relatives. Many rights advocacy organizations recognize Dennis Christensen as a political prisoner.

“In principle, in Russia this was everything that was in the Soviet Union. Jehovah’s Witnesses were under a ban for decades, they met secretly, they read the Bible surreptitiously. This all was already, it is history. This has not stopped people,” she recalls. Irina says that now a second round of repressions against Jehovah’s Witnesses is going on and they are ready for it.

“The prison terms are the very same; at that time they gave ten years, and now it is ten years. One for one. The article simply is different. There you were considered an enemy of the people, and here, an extremist,” Irina says.

She is not making plans and she is not contemplating alternatives in the event of Dennis’ deportation from Russia. Irina maintains that she and her husband have never thought about leaving the country and they do not want to even now.

There are already dozens of cases of Russian Jehovah’s Witnesses in the European Court of Human Rights, including an appeal by Dennis Christensen against his detention and by Irina Christensen for deprivation of her right to meet with her husband during the investigation. Irina does not doubt that they will win these cases, since the E.C.H.R. has already made decisions in favor of the Jehovah’s Witnesses in similar instances. In the event of an unfavorable outcome of the trial in Orel, they will of course also appeal it to the E.C.H.R.

It seems that Dennis Christensen has already lost faith in Russian justice. “To be honest, I always had the feeling—both

during the investigation and during the trial—that everything had already been decided long, long ago, and I am already convicted,” Christensen acknowledges.

And he adds: “We will see whether I am right.” (tr. by PDS, posted 23 January 2019)

[Translator’s note: this is a translation of the second half of the original BBC article.]

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# **RUSSIA: Almost two-year-long trial of Jehovah's Witness nears end**

*In trial of case of Danish believer in Orel, defendant himself provided explanations*

Russia Religion News (18.01.2019) – <https://bit.ly/2AVCJZv> – On 15 and 16 January 2019, Dennis Christensen, who is charged with “arranging the activity of an extremist organization” (Art. 282.2 of CC RF), presented to the court his explanations. He confirmed that he professes the religion of Jehovah's Witnesses, analyzed the motives ascribed to him by the investigation, pointed out the shortcomings in the indictment, openly exposed the secret witness of the prosecution, and declared his complete innocence.

## ***Concerning his faith and intent***

“It is true that I am an elder,” he confessed in court. “Among Jehovah's Witnesses this is not an office but a way of life of a minister of God.” As evidence, Christensen quoted for the court excerpts from the Bible that speak about the high moral requirements for elders. However he decisively refuted the accusation of “convoking meetings” and that he is an “organizer” of worship services. Christensen described in detail that Christian meetings are an expression of Christian love on the part of each person and that they were conducted in Orel before his arrival and will be conducted if he is not there.

In analyzing the motives ascribed to him as extremist, Dennis Christensen described why he likes the religion of the Witnesses: "We call one another brothers and sisters... After such meetings a person feels encouraged. We discuss how to provide practical help to those who are sick. It is possible they need help in purchasing groceries or preparing meals. The elderly often need help if something breaks or a light bulb needs changing. We discuss how to help people so that they will have close relations with God and how to explain biblical truths to them. We discuss how one can improve relations with neighbors, coworkers, and classmates. Sometimes about what we could do in order that our city becomes yet cleaner." He summarized: "As is evident from the aforesaid, when I became a Jehovah's Witness and subsequently, when I came to Russia, I did not have any intention to commit a crime."

### ***Was it forbidden to believe in Jehovah***

Back in the SIZO [investigative cell], Christensen received the possibility to acquaint himself with the judicial decision finding the local religious organization of Jehovah's Witnesses of Orel to be extremist. He read an excerpt from the ruling of the Russian Supreme Court of 18 October 2016: "The rights of members of the local religious organization of Jehovah's Witnesses of Orel to freedom of religious confession will not be violated, since they are not denied the possibility of exercising and conducting religious rituals not connected with the distribution of religious literature of extremist contents." After this Christensen declared: "If the Supreme Court considers it legal for believers, including former members of the local religious organization, to conduct and profess their religious rituals, why then was I accused

that in my case these actions are illegal? If the Supreme Court has given such an explanation, why am I accused that I should have understood it differently?"

Christensen explained that the local religious organization of Orel ceased to exist on 18 October 2016 on the basis of a court decision. But this did not mean that believers in the city of Orel were required to cease believing in God. "Since article 28 of the constitution has not be changed up to the present time, I consider that I and my fellow believers had the right to conduct worship services, which were not in any way connected with the legal entity that had been liquidated."

### ***Concerning the secret records of telephone conversations***

"The F.S.B. secretly surveilled me in the course of nine months," Christensen said. "And I did not suspect this. And in all of that period I never denigrated anybody, I did not encourage genocide, nor the persecution of other people, nor the destruction of the family, nor violence, nor anything else that I am accused of. The fact that in my telephone conversations various questions were discussed which were connected with my life as a believing person is not evidence that I committed some kind of crime." "In none of my telephone conversations did there even occur the expression 'local religious organization,'" Christensen continued. "Meanwhile the prosecution arbitrarily declares that I talked about the local religious organization of Jehovah's Witnesses of Orel. And I never had anything to do with it either legally or actually. Consequently I never had either the intention nor the desire to revive the activity of this organization."

## ***Exposure of a secret witness***

Separately Dennis Christensen focused on the testimony of a secret witness with the pseudonym of "Ermilov." "The court was not able to be convinced of the fact that the real name of this citizen is Oleg Kurdiumov. He is a teacher of the Orel State University," Dennis Christensen said. "Under the pretext of a person who was interested in the Bible, Kurdiumov began, in accordance with instructions of the F.S.B., to take pictures with a hidden camera, and then also on instructions from the F.S.B. to secretly record on a dictaphone our conversations with him. Since the audio and video tapes he obtained did not contain any information about crimes committed by me, Kurdiumov decided to supplement them with his own fantasies, giving testimony under a pseudonym. I regard this act as unworthy of a university instructor... As the witness Kurdiumov explained, much of the information he gave to the court, he read on the internet network. That means, his testimony cannot be used as evidence in the case, inasmuch as it is only hearsay."

"Esteemed court, I wish to emphasize that in contrast with the side of the prosecution, I never viewed the peaceful worship services of believers to be a continuation of the activity of the liquidated local religious organization," Dennis Christensen said in conclusion. "I never had the intention of committing a crime." (tr. by PDS, posted 18 January 2019)

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## **RUSSIA: Case of Danish Jehovah's Witness continues**

*Summary of hearings in case of Danish believer in Orel*

Russia Religion News (09.11.2018) – <https://bit.ly/2KliQmQ> – In October 2018, in the Zheleznodorozhny district court of the city of Orel, 11 court sessions were held in the case of the Danish subject Dennis Christensen, who faces up to 10 years incarceration (on the basis of part 1 of article 282.2 of the CC of the RF) merely for the fact that he professes the religion of Jehovah's Witnesses. The case is being heard by Judge Aleksei Rudnev.

On 8, 10, 15-17, and 22-24 October 2018, the court examined religious books in digital format that were discovered on a computer seized from Dennis Christensen. In the courtroom, separate fragments from these books and brochures were read, specifically encouraging the maintenance of peaceful relations with people and the strengthening of family ties, especially

if a life partner has a different religion.

The prosecution called attention to fragments explaining who are the elders of a Christian congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses and what their pastoral concern consists of and what personal requirements they must meet. In particular, the instructions enumerated in the New Testament that each of them "must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, moderate in habits, sensible, self-disciplined, hospitable, and capable of teaching, and they should not cause drunken scandals or beat others but be reasonable, not belligerent, not love money, and manage their households well. . . ." It was left for the lawyers merely to note that the image of the person described is entirely unlike that of a criminal. The prosecutor also called attention to a quotation from the New Testament Acts of the Apostles: "It is necessary to obey God rather than men." When Dennis Christensen was asked: "Do you know instances when Jehovah's Witnesses refused to obey laws of the state, making a choice in favor of the laws of God?" he answered that he knows of one such case, when German Jehovah's Witnesses during World War II went to concentration camps instead of the eastern front, refusing to kill Russian soldiers.

The lawyers also called attention to the fact that not one of the books or brochures found by the prosecution had been ruled to be "extremist."

On 24 October 2018, the court again extended Christensen's term of detention in custody by three months, until 1 February 2019. The next day an appeal was filed against this order.

On 29 October 2018, the court studied electronic files from tablets seized from other believers. The prosecution interprets the very fact that the citizens used books in electronic form as measures of conspiracy. Lawyers consider such an interpretation far-fetched.

In describing the seized files, the investigator considered without basis that they belonged to the local religious organization of Jehovah's Witnesses in Orel. When lawyers called attention to this, the judge asked the prosecutor whether the files contain any information about the local religious organization. The prosecutor had to respond that they do not. Christensen also explained that he has nothing to do with these files.

In reviewing other evidence of Christensen's guilt included in the case by investigators, the lawyers called the court's attention to photographs where Christensen and his wife were shown in a supermarket alongside a person in a costume of a fairytale character. The lawyers asked what these and many other pieces of "evidence" prove. They do not prove anything and they have been introduced into the case merely for volume, which shows the essence of this criminal case as based on nothing, the lawyers concluded.

On 30 October 2018 the court continued to examine materials of the case. The prosecutor read various bank statements from 2016. In depicting them, the prosecutor several time repeated the phrase "it has no significance for this criminal case," so that the judge asked: "If the materials have no significance for this case, then why are we wasting time here?" The prosecutor refused to read the next protocol consisting of 48 points.

In trying to prove Christensen's guilt, the prosecution added to the materials of the case a certificate from a military commission regarding nine conscripts who refused service in the army, citing their religious convictions. The lawyers called attention to the fact that the prosecution's use of the wording "refused service in the army" is incorrect inasmuch as the state provides alternative service for citizens. In selecting alternative service, a citizen is following the law strictly. Then the lawyer read out where each of these nine youths had been sent for conducting alternative service. Some served in the Russian postal service and others in a gerontology center caring for elderly people. The lawyer suggested thinking about the feelings of the elderly for whom these people were caring and how grateful they were to them. Without any doubt, the young believers were fulfilling their civic duty to the state.

On 31 October 2018, the initiative in surveying the materials of the case was passed to the defense. Lawyers called the judge's attention to the fact that after the case was opened against Christensen, the investigation did not arrest him for some time. That means that the investigator himself did not think that Christensen could flee. Consequently, his detention in custody is without grounds.

In addition, lawyers identified defects in the expert analyses existing in the case.

Subsequent sessions in this case are scheduled for 6, 7, 12, and 14 November 2018 in the Zheleznodorozhny district court of Orel (45-a Maxim Gorky St.). (tr. by PDS, posted 11 November



2018)

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## **RUSSIA: Foreign Jehovah's Witness kept in custody in Orel**

*Orel appeal hearing in case of Danish Jehovah's Witness continued to 28 September.*

Russia Religion News (21.09.2017) – <http://bit.ly/2fjE8hb> – On 20 September 2017, after a four-hour session of the Orel provincial court, an appeal hearing in the case of the Dane Dennis Christensen, a Jehovah's Witness who is being held in the SIZO of the city of Orel, was adjourned. The reason for this is that the court of the first instance did not deliver to the appeal a part of the evidence of the defense that had

been examined during the consideration of the question of the extension of the detention.

The court of the first instance chose the harshest measure of restraint, suggesting without reason that Dennis Christensen could run away from the investigation and the court by leaving Russia. The lawyers pointed to the excessiveness of such a harsh measure of restraint. Investigators have confiscated the believer's passport and therefore he cannot physically exit from Russia. A letter from the Danish consulate was attached to the case which says: "On the basis of humanitarian considerations, the Royal Embassy of Denmark in Moscow, in supporting the petition . . . for substituting for the means of restraint in the form of detention in custody another means of restraint, gives assurances that the Royal Embassy of Denmark in Moscow will not provide a new passport to D.O. Christensen and will not assist D.O. Christensen in leaving the territory of the Russian federation."

The believer is suspected of continuing the activity of the organization of Jehovah's Witnesses, which was liquidated by a court. In seeking his complete acquittal, at this stage the lawyers are asking the appellate court to select for Dennis Christensen a measure of restraint in the form of bail or house arrest. The appellate hearing will resume in the Orel provincial court on 28 September 2017 at 14:00. (tr. by PDS, posted 21 September 2017)

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