

# The first male couple on Denmark's "Dancing with the Stars" is stirring up controversy... & winning

*They have gone out of their way to respond to critics of two men dancing together on TV.*

By David Castillo

LGBTQ Nation (06.11.2019) – <https://bit.ly/2NK2l25> – Jakob Fauerby and Silas Holst are making Danish TV history with their appearance together on Vild med Dans, the country's version of the Dancing With the Stars franchise.

The pair is the first same-sex couple in the show's 16-year history and so far they have scored the highest points in four out of eight episodes. And this Friday they'll compete once again in a season that has surprised many, especially Fauerby himself.

"Not in my wildest dreams did I anticipate this," said Fauerby, a Copenhagen-based actor who said that his goal all along, aside from becoming a better dancer, was to show people that same-sex dancing was something they could tolerate.

The experience, says Fauerby – best known for his membership

in the satirical group PLATT-FORM – has been an “amazing rollercoaster.” Even in liberal Denmark, the news that the wildly popular show would feature two men dancing sparked controversy among some long-time fans. The criticism ranged from the ugly, like those that complained about how it was “unnatural,” to laments about how few beautiful dancing gowns the season would showcase. Many more wondered who would be “the man” and who would be “the woman.”

Through it all, Fauerby has maintained a positive outlook, confident that what he is doing is good for his fellow Danes, especially his fellow LGBTQ brothers and sisters. It was actually Fauerby’s decision to set the condition of dancing with another male.

“I had already thought that if they called me, I would ask if it was possible to dance with a man,” said Fauerby. “So, when they called and I asked, they said it was probably something they could talk about.”

A few days later he received the good news that his request could be met. Fauerby credits the producers for creating the opportunity, noting that he believes producers probably wanted to feature a same-sex couple for quite some time but that they were unsure about how to ask someone to represent the LGBTQ community. They also had to find the right professional dancer who was willing to participate.

“It’s difficult to ask someone ‘Hey do you want to be in the show, but do you want to be the LGBT representation of it?’” he said. “So, I think they just waited for someone to express

the willingness to do it themselves.”

As for the dancer, they found an enthusiastic participant in Silas Holst, a Vild med Dans favorite who came back from a five-year break to dance with Fauerby.

“I am absolutely delighted, but it is even more important to me that we do well,” Holst told Danish outlet B.T.

They have indeed done quite well. In the show’s premier, they scored 18 points, placing first with the highest score of the night. The next week, they received the highest score again with 23 points.

Watching them dance, it is no wonder that the pair has been victorious in half of the shows that have aired so far. Indeed, many of the comments from fans have pointed out that it can be sometimes hard to tell who is the professional and who is the amateur.

Throughout the competition, Fauerby has met his critics and detractors head-on. He has made the rounds on TV news shows and radio call-in shows to speak directly to his critics. But he says he understands why there are such strong feelings about it, especially in the age of streaming and on-demand.

“We are a small country of only 5.6 million people, and every Friday more than a million people tune in to watch the show and many more watch it on-demand afterward,” said Fauerby.

“There are very few shows that everyone sees, and this is one of them, so there are a lot of feelings connected to it.”

So Fauerby has tried to meet these people where they are in order to understand them better, but also to let them know that he has no plans on “ruining” the show, just that he wants to do his best. Of most importance to the actor, however, is the representation his appearance brings to the LGBTQ community.

“For me, in my living room, when I dance at home, I dance with a man,” said Fauerby. “When I was a child, I never saw representation. We’re just one couple out of 160 in 16 years. So for me if a young boy, girl, or trans person has the opportunity to see that positive representation as part of a TV show that is empowering in itself.

Much of the early criticism hurled at the news centered on a fear of sexualization of the competition. It is a fear Fauerby hopes has been dashed since his debut.

“What happened after the first two shows is that people saw weren’t going to have anal sex on stage,” said Fauerby with some laughter. “It is feelings. It is sensuality. But it is not sexuality. It’s just two people dancing.”

The representation Fauerby has striven to showcase has also extended beyond the stage and into his family life. Just over two weeks ago, he and his husband Anders, together with their good friend Rebecca, welcomed to the world a new baby girl.

In fact, she arrived on a Friday night, which is when the show airs live. He, Anders, and Rebecca had been musing for several months about what might happen if she decided to come on a show night. After his daughter was born, he traveled to the studio to prepare for the show.

“I missed the rehearsal, arrived an hour before the show started, did a quick press conference, then got into makeup and danced the show,” he said. “We are a rainbow family, and it’s been overwhelming and amazing.”

At 42, Fauerby says one thing about this opportunity that he has found most incredible is the privilege he has to learn dance from a professional dancer.

“To learn something that you weren’t able to do before is an enormous privilege,” said Fauerby. “For several hours a day, one of the best dancers, not only in Denmark, but in the world is teaching me how to dance and that is just amazing.”

Fauerby also credits the platform the show has given him to take a stand for LGBTQ rights and visibility. The privilege to do so is not lost on him, and he has taken every opportunity he’s been given to make sure that voice is heard.

“Having this tremendous power to have access to speech, the privilege of having a voice is something I take very seriously,” he said. “And something has changed. We were

standing at the Royal Theater with more than a million people watching us at home dancing the rumba. That has not been done before in Denmark.”

As for LGBTQ people outside of Denmark, Fauerby hopes that they see his participation on the show and understand just why visibility is so important and that they act.

“LGBTQ people with resources, access, and courage should know that representation is so important. That’s easy for me to say because I live in a rich country, in a democracy that works, with legislation that works, where women’s rights are in place, where gay rights are in place,” said Fauerby. “We have a lot of fights here, especially regarding transgender people, but the legislation is there. So I’m privileged, but I cannot tell someone in Saudi Arabia to go out and fight.”

“So if you live in a place where your safety isn’t jeopardized, then please go out and be visible. Show the world that being you is okay.”

Jakob Fauerby and Silas Holst will compete this in week nine of the show, which airs Friday nights at 8 p.m. on Denmark’s TV2.

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# DENMARK: Man arrested for defacing more than 80 graves with “666” in church cemetery



***Photo: L'Observatoire de la Christianophobie***

Observatory on Intolerance and Discrimination against Christians (21.07.2019) – <https://bit.ly/2TLfKZ7> – A 46-year-old man was charged with spray-painting the number ‘666’ on 87 tombstones in a church cemetery in North Jutland, Denmark. Staff from the Hadsund Church noticed the damage on Sunday morning, July 21st. After an investigation, the man was arrested on July 24th after witnesses came forward. The man, who had been convicted of similar vandalism of a cemetery in 2016, denied responsibility for this incident.

“We are charging him with serious vandalism. I am pleased that we were able to quickly arrest a suspect in a case that we know has affected many citizens in the area around Hadsund, said Deputy Police Inspector Sune Myrup, North Jutland Police.

Pastor Winnie Sella Huus said the act was “very violent” and “hurts right in the heart.”

Read here about the 2016 incident at the nearby Visborg Church where over 100 gravestones were vandalized with spray paint.

Sources: tv2nord.dk, tv2nord.dk, BT.dk, Nordjyske, Nordjyske

See [picture](#) and [video](#) at: <https://www.tv2nord.dk/artikel/46-aarig-anholdt-haervaerk-paa-kirkegaard>

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## **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->

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***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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countries: <http://hrwf.eu/newsletters/forb/>

List of hundreds of documented cases of believers of various  
faiths in 20

countries: <http://hrwf.eu/forb/forb-and-blasphemy-prisoners-list/>

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## **RUSSIA: Danish Jehovah's Witness sentenced to six years in prison**

By Anton Troianovski

The Washington Post (06.02.2019) – <https://wapo.st/2Sdlfl0> – A Russian court sentenced a Danish Jehovah's Witness to six years in prison for extremism Wednesday, one of the harshest verdicts in years against a Western citizen here and the latest incident in Russia's crackdown on personal freedoms.

The Jehovah's Witness, Dennis Christensen, was detained in May 2017 after a police raid on his congregation in the city of Orel, south of Moscow, and has been in jail ever since. On Wednesday, the district court ruled he was guilty of "organizing the activity of an extremist organization," according to the Russian branch of Jehovah's Witnesses.

The Russian Supreme Court ruled Jehovah's Witnesses to be an extremist organization in 2017, ordered its activities banned,

and said its property could be seized. Christensen is the first member of the religious group to be sentenced for extremism, said Tanya Lokshina, the Moscow-based associate director for Human Rights Watch's Europe and Central Asia division.

The ruling comes amid an ongoing crackdown on personal and civil liberties in Russia and sends the message that people's prominence or foreign citizenship won't protect them from prosecution.

"Six years in jail for peacefully practicing your own religion is something that comes right out of the history book on Soviet dissent," Lokshina said. "It sends a very strong signal to all those who are ready to stand up that there will be no mercy."

Christensen will appeal the decision, the Russian branch of Jehovah's Witnesses said.

Danish Foreign Minister Anders Samuelsen said his country would continue to assist Christensen and called on Russia "to respect freedom of religion." Yaroslav Sivulsky, a representative of the European Association of Jehovah's Witnesses, said Christensen was punished for "reading the Bible, preaching, and living a moral way of life."

Russian authorities have described Jehovah's Witnesses – the group says it has about 170,000 believers in Russia – as a threat to public order. At the Russian Supreme Court, the

government brought in former followers to testify that top church officials took “total control” of their “intimate life, education and work.” The Jehovah’s Witnesses’ lawyers have denied those allegations.

Founded in the United States in the 19th century, Jehovah’s Witnesses reject subservience to the state and believe God to be the only true ruler. They do not serve in the military or vote.

Scores of other Jehovah’s Witnesses are in detention around the country, watchdog groups say.

In a meeting with human rights activists in December, Russian President Vladimir Putin described extremism charges against Jehovah’s Witnesses as “nonsense,” leading to speculation that legal pressure on the religion’s believers would soon stop. Wednesday’s ruling, however, shows this is not the case.

Russia’s current crackdown extends beyond religion. It comes as the Kremlin faces growing signs of public discontent amid persistent reports of official corruption and a deeply unpopular government plan to raise the retirement age. Putin’s approval ratings have fallen to their lowest level since before his annexation of the Ukrainian territory of Crimea in 2014, which was widely lauded at home. They are still at 64 percent, according to the independent Levada-Center, but well down from earlier levels in the 80s.

Oyub Titiev, head of the human rights organization Memorial’s



Chechnya office, has spent more than a year behind bars on drug charges that his lawyers insist are fabricated. In December, Russia detained an American, Paul Whelan, on spy accusations – though officials haven't said what he was spying on or on whose behalf.

In January, authorities in the southern city of Rostov-on-Don charged activist Anastasia Shevchenko for “repeated participation in the activities of an undesirable organization” – the first time ever that such criminal charges have been filed in Russia, according to Amnesty International. The “undesirable organization” in question is Open Russia, a human rights group founded by exiled former oil tycoon and Kremlin critic Mikhail Khodorkovsky.

The state may now be laying the groundwork for an even more far-reaching crackdown on dissent. A draft law pending in the lower house of parliament, the State Duma, would create the groundwork for the Russian Internet to be isolated from the rest of the world.

“We’ve seen very dire developments where freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, and freedom of association are concerned,” Human Rights Watch’s Lokshina said.

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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.

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