

UKRAINE - CRIMEA/RUSSIA: Jehovah's Witnesses' homes searched in Crimea

RFERL (16.11.2018) – <https://bit.ly/2PtC8rb> – DZHANKOY, Ukraine – Media reports in Russia say more than 30 houses belonging to Jehovah's Witnesses were searched by Federal Security Service (FSB) officers in the Moscow-annexed Ukrainian region of Crimea.

The reports cite FSB officials as saying that the searches were conducted on November 16 in the city of Dzhankoy.

An RFE/RL correspondent in Crimea confirmed searches in five homes of local Jehovah's Witnesses.

The leader of the Jehovah's Witnesses community in Crimea, Sergei Filatov, and several other Jehovah's Witnesses, including two members of Filatov's family, were summoned to the FSB headquarters in Crimea's capital, Simferopol, on November 16, for questioning.

Filatov was charged with "organizing an extremist community."

Media reports say that Filatov's community was run by the Jehovah's Witnesses group in the Ukrainian city of Kharkiv and

“may be linked to Ukraine’s Security Service.”

Earlier this week, Russian media reports said that Jehovah’s Witnesses had been detained and their homes searched in Siberia and the Far East and Urals regions .

Last year, Russia’s Supreme Court labeled Jehovah’s Witnesses an extremist organization, banning the denomination from the country.

The Moscow-based Memorial human rights center has recognized 62 members of the religious community as political prisoners. According to Memorial, 23 of them are in detention while others are under house arrest.

In June, advisers to Russian President Vladimir Putin questioned the legality of criminal cases opened against the Jehovah’s Witnesses, asking the Prosecutor-General’s Office to protect the group’s freedom of belief.

Also in June, some 60 Russian writers, historians, and activists signed an appeal calling on authorities to stop persecuting the group.

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