

RUSSIA: Mormons worry about a fate like Jehovah's Witnesses

Kuban Mormons fear repressions against their church

Russia Religion News (11.03.2019) – <https://bit.ly/2TKVzNC> – The decision of the Krasnodar territory court about the deportation of two American Mormons is connected with the start of repressions against this church in Russia, a believer from Novorossiisk and the lawyer Sergei Glizuntsa suggest. In the case there is no evidence that the missionaries taught the English language under the guise of preaching, the defense attorney insists.

Kavkazskii Uzel has reported that on 2 March a court in Novorossiisk ordered the deportation to the U.S.A. of adherents of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints David Udo Hague and Cole Davis Brodovsky. The Krasnodar territory court left that decision in force, agreeing with the conclusion that they taught the English language under the guise of religious activity. The American citizens themselves did not acknowledge guilt, explaining that they merely conducted conversations in the English language on abstract topics.

In the opinion of Hague and Brodovsky's lawyer, Sergei Glizuntsa, the decision of the two courts may speak of the start of repressions against Mormons in Russia. "I think that it went through all instances like the Jehovah's Witnesses* were treated," he told a Kavkazskii Uzel correspondent.

On 20 April 2017, the Russian Supreme Court granted the petition of the Ministry of Justice regarding the liquidation of all Russian organizations of Jehovah's Witnesses* as extremist and on 16 August the "Administrative Center of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia*" and all of its local affiliates wound up on the list of forbidden organizations, a report prepared by Kavkazskii Uzel, "Jehovah's Witnesses*-extremists or victims of injustice?" notes.

This same fear was also expressed to a Kavkazskii Uzel correspondent by a Mormon woman from Novorossiisk, Irina. "I think that they are beginning to persecute us like the Jehovah's Witnesses* and this is the 'first swallow.' Our organization is not prohibited in Russia, but most likely this is not for long. The Russian Orthodox Church has already declared that we 'warp the minds' of youth. This is not so. We advocate a healthy lifestyle and family values," the woman declared.

At the meeting with which law enforcement found fault, a discussion was conducted in the English language about the traditions and culture of Mormons, she explained. Such conversations fall under the definition of volunteer and missionary activity, which Hague and Brodovsky indicated were the goals of their coming to Russia, the believer is sure.

"The guys came in order to become acquainted with our country. They are very open and they were helping someone all the time. They worked in social shelters, helped the elderly, and made repairs in the apartments of disabled persons. During meetings in the house of worship they described their own country. Our

youth had the opportunity to talk a bit in English in order to practice," Irina, a parishioner of the church, reported.

The guilt of Hague and Brodovsky was not proven, the lawyer declared.

There was no evidence of illegal educational activity in the administrative case, Glizuntsa declared. He said the young people simply met with Russians in the meetinghouse and talked about America and asked them to talk about themselves. On 1 March, personnel of the Federal Migration Service came to the meetinghouse and took descriptions from all persons present in the meeting, but there was no audio recording of the meeting itself, the lawyer noted.

"There were no syllabi, no homework assignments, no payment for these services. It turns out that there is only one indicator of their illegal activity—they corrected a person who spoke English incorrectly. I do not consider that teaching, because I also correct anybody who speaks Russian incorrectly," the lawyer noted.

The case is based on the words of one of the Russians who perceived the meeting as an educational process, Sergei Glizuntsa reported. "But there was neither a blackboard on which one could write or alphabet to study nor notebooks in order to write notes; there was nothing," the lawyer emphasized.

He said that he intends to appeal the decision of the

Krasnodar territory court, which left in force the decision of the court of the first instance. "We will appeal further, to the Supreme Court. So that there will not be a decision of a court and such situations will not arise with other representatives of religious organizations," Glizuntsa explained.

At the present time, the Mormons are being held in a special facility for foreign citizens in Gulkevich district. They have not complained about the conditions of detention. They were allowed to telephone their parents and they are fed three times a day, their attorney explained. "Unfortunately, there are no deadlines for the deportation. People from the near abroad are kept there for six months. There is an issue of paperwork and the decision from the territory court has just today been sent for implementation," Sergei Glizuntsa complained.

*The organization is considered to be extremist and its activity is prohibited in Russia by decision of a court. (tr. by PDS, posted 13 March 2019)

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