

# **RUSSIA: Jehovah's Witnesses headquarters in St Petersburg on the way to liquidation by the authorities**

HRWF (15.02.2017) – On 16 January 2017, the Moscow City Court rejected the appeal filed by the Jehovah's Witness Administrative Center, St Petersburg against the Prosecutor General's liquidation warning. On 8 February 2017, an application was filed with the European Court of Human Rights challenging the Prosecutor General's liquidation warning.

In the meantime, on 2 February 2017 the Administrative Center received notice from the Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation that it would conduct an "unplanned inspection" on the Administrative Center. The Ministry of Justice had ordered the Administrative Center to turn over thousands of pages of documents as part of its "inspection", including a listing of all of its property, bank accounts, organizations that are part of the "structure" of the Administrative Center, and all donations received by the Administrative Center.

That inspection was scheduled to begin on 8 February 2017. However, due to the thousands of documents requested, the Ministry of Justice deferred production of those documents until 15 February 2017.

The Order of the "unplanned inspection" states that it is being conducted based on the 27 January 2017 Order of Deputy Prosecutor General V. Ya. Grin (who also issued the liquidation warning for extremism).

They were refused permission to make a copy of the Prosecutor General's 27 January 2017 Order, although a lawyer representing the Administrative Center was permitted to read

it. In essence, that Order alleged that despite the 2 March 2016 liquidation warning (which, as the Order noted, is now in force), 'structural subdivisions' of the Administrative Center engaged in so-called 'extremist activity.' In support of this assertion, the Prosecutor General has referred to trial decisions over the past months during which local religious organizations of Jehovah's Witnesses were liquidated or convicted under Article 20.29 of the Code of Administrative Violations. All those cases were fabricated by the planting of literature on the Federal List of Extremist Materials in places of worship, or by means of statements of false witnesses.

The "unplanned inspection" is scheduled to last from 8 February to 27 February 2017.

*(\*) The exact location of the offices of the Administrative Center is the village of Solnechnoye, a suburb of St. Petersburg located some 40 kilometers from the city.*

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