

Table of Contents

- ***Office of Jehovah's Witnesses shelled in Tbilisi***
 - ***Jehovah's Witnesses' plan to build Kingdom Hall in center of town resisted***
 - ***Jehovah's Witnesses launch informational campaign in April***
-

Office of Jehovah's Witnesses shelled in Tbilisi

Caucasian Knot (25.11.2015) - <http://bit.ly/1P4yttA> - In Tbilisi, the office of Jehovah's Witnesses was shelled. After the shelling, the facade of the building bears holes of 15 bullets. No one suffered as a result of the incident.

During the attack, the office of Jehovah's Witnesses, located in the residential district of Vazisubani, was empty. The incident occurred in the evening of November 24. Today, staff members of the organization have filed a complaint to the police, the "Interfax" reports.

The staff members of the office of Jehovah's Witnesses could not explain the reason for the attack on their office. A criminal case has been instituted on the fact of the incident, the "Georgia Online" reports.

The "Caucasian Knot" has repeatedly reported on the incidents associated with pressure on Jehovah's Witnesses in Georgia. On October 17, 1999, in Tbilisi, Vasily Mkalavishvili, an unchurched priest, and his followers attacked members of Jehovah's Witnesses. The victims filed a complaint to the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) about violation of six articles of the European Convention, and in 2007, they won the lawsuit. On January 31, 2005, Vasily Mkalavishvili was sentenced by the Tbilisi District Court to six years of imprisonment. In 2007, the decision of the Rustavi District Court, official Paata Bluashvili was sentenced to six years of imprisonment for creating obstacles in the performance of a religious rite of Jehovah's Witnesses.

Jehovah's Witnesses' plan to build Kingdom Hall in center of town resisted

Orthodox believers promote transfer of Jehovah's witnesses house of worship

Kavkazskii Uzel (28.04.2015) <http://www2.stetson.edu/~psteeves/relnews/150428e.html> - An initiative group of parishioners of an Orthodox church in the Georgian city of Terzhola are protesting the construction of a Jehovah's Witnesses house of worship in the center of the municipality. They have proposed moving the building to the outskirts of the settlement.

A discussion of the initiative for transferring the construction occurred on 26 April in the House of Culture of the municipality of Terzhola, attended by deputies of the city council, officials of the district administration, and representatives of the Georgian Orthodox Church and parishioners of the Orthodox parish. Representatives of the Jehovah's Witnesses also were invited to the meeting, but they did not arrive.

"A public school, children's day care, and various institutions are located in the district center. Therefore, we consider construction of a functional building there to be

inappropriate," declared a member of the initiative group, Maya Tortladze, of the Rustavi-2 television company, Gruziiia Online reported on 27 April.

Members of the initiative group noted that they are advocating not a ban on construction but moving the building from the center of the city. Representatives of the district administration of Terzhola agreed with this initiative and offered an alternative parcel for construction, Novosti Gruziiia reports.

Comments from representatives of the Jehovah's Witnesses relative to the plans for the transfer of the site for construction of the house of worship have not been received.

Kavkazskii Uzel has written about the persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses in the regions of the Caucasus and the south of Russia. Thus, 16 members of the religious organization in Taganrog were accused of extremism because, according to the investigation, they continued to participate in the activity of the congregation after its prohibition. On 30 July 2014 the city court of Taganrog sentenced four defendants to a suspended sentence and they and another three members of the Jehovah's Witnesses congregation were fined. However all of the convicts were released from paying because of the statute of limitations. Another nine defendants were acquitted. All 16 defendants in the case filed an appeal against the city court's verdict. In their appeals the defendants in the case call their criminal prosecution an example of religious persecution and they insist on complete exoneration. (tr. by PDS, posted 30 April 2015)

Jehovah's Witnesses launch informational campaign in April

JW.ORG (15.04.2015) - <http://www.jw.org/en/news/legal/by-region/georgia/republic-human-rights-awareness/> - On April 1, 2015, Jehovah's Witnesses launched an informational campaign to contact all police departments, municipalities, and prosecutors' offices throughout the Republic of Georgia. The purpose of this campaign is to raise awareness of a recent, significant European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) judgment, *Begheluri and Others v. Georgia* (See <http://www.strasbourgconsortium.org/portal.case.php?pageId=10#caseId=1266>), which dealt with the violation of the rights of Jehovah's Witnesses in Georgia. The campaign provides law enforcement officials with information about the facts of the case, the judgment, and the religious activities of Jehovah's Witnesses.

Georgia's Past Toleration of Violence

From 1999 to 2003, followers of a defrocked Georgian Orthodox priest organized mob attacks to viciously beat Jehovah's Witnesses. Although the Witnesses lodged a total of 784 complaints with the police for these and similar incidents, officials either turned a blind eye to the violence or occasionally committed violent acts themselves against the Witnesses. None of the Witnesses' complaints produced any tangible results. Because the Georgian authorities failed to act, the perpetrators became increasingly bold, even physically attacking Witnesses in courtrooms, at large religious conventions, and on the streets.

ECHR Decisions Mark a Turning Point

Jehovah's Witnesses in Georgia filed two applications with the ECHR to address these attacks. The Court ruled on the first case in May 2007, [*](#) and on the second case—*Begheluri and Others v. Georgia*—in October 2014. In both judgments, the ECHR condemned the Georgian State's involvement in the attacks, establishing a clear link between the State's indifference and an escalation of violence. As the ECHR noted in the [Begheluri judgment](#) (*) "the Georgian authorities created a climate of impunity, which ultimately encouraged other attacks against Jehovah's Witnesses throughout the country." [*](#)

Commendably, the Georgian government issued a statement the day after the *Begheluri* judgment was announced, vowing to prevent future abuses:

"Georgia is firmly committed to protecting freedom of thought, conscience and religion, as well as human rights in general. The country is determined to ensure equality before the law and accountability for human rights abuses. In particular, it will never again allow a climate of impunity or toleration towards such abuses."

Conditions in Georgia Improve

Conditions for Jehovah's Witnesses in Georgia today are in sharp contrast to those of previous years. Witnesses are able to worship in peace and are grateful that law enforcement officials now generally protect their rights. Jehovah's Witnesses have been able to build houses of worship and have recently expanded their headquarters in the region.

- However, some officials know little about Jehovah's Witnesses or their beliefs and may know nothing of the *Begheluri* judgment or the government's official statement. In addition, religiously motivated attacks still occur and remain unpunished—for example, in 2014, Witnesses documented at least 30 physical assaults against them. Jehovah's Witnesses have filed additional applications with the ECHR to address these issues. [*](#)

- The April campaign to inform officials should lead to further improvement in showing respect for human rights throughout Georgia. Jehovah's Witnesses are grateful for the Georgian government's commitment never to allow a climate of impunity to take root again, and they expect that the government will remain dedicated to prosecuting those guilty of religious hate crimes.

- (*) See 14 October 2014 press release of Jehovah's Witnesses summarizing the facts at <http://www.jw.org/en/news/legal/by-region/georgia/echr-judgment-freedom-religious-violence/>
