

## **HRWF calls on Russian officials to vote against the banning of Jehovah's Witness activities in Russia**

HRWF (23.03.2017) – On 15 March 2017, the Ministry of Justice in Russia filed a claim with the Supreme Court requesting “to declare the religious organization, the Administrative Center of Jehovah's Witnesses, extremist, ban its activity, and liquidate it”.

The consequences of such a ruling could result in the 400+ Witness entities to be closed, and the properties to be seized by the Russian state. Furthermore, it would lead to increased persecution of the Witnesses in Russia, a group which numbers around 170,000.

Discrimination against and the persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia has unfortunately dated back to the 1950s. The recently proposed laws, as well as the discrimination against the group in the past, represent clear violations of the right to Freedom of Religion or Belief, as guaranteed by the Russian constitution, the European Convention on Human Rights, and the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights reads:

“1. Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief, in worship, teaching, practice and observance.

2. Freedom to manifest one's religion or beliefs shall be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society in the interests of public safety, for the protection of public order, health or morals, or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.”

It seems that the newly proposed laws have been suggested under the second clause, and as experts in the field, we would like to share with you our research regarding the Jehovah's Witness religious group.

As an independent non-governmental organization we conduct extensive investigations and in-depth research into religious groups around the world. In 2015, we published a report on the Jehovah's Witnesses, and were able to confidently conclude that the religious group is a peaceful organisation. We found that Jehovah's Witnesses are not engaged politically and do not pose any security threat to society. Generally, they obey the law of the land and respect authorities. Whatever one might think of the doctrine or methods of Jehovah's Witnesses, respect and the freedom to practice their faith are clearly due to them in accordance with international law and standards of human rights. We would like to invite you to read our entire report of the group here: <http://hrwf.eu/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/HRWF-FoRB-Annual-Report-2015.pdf>

HRWF calls on the Russian Federation to:

- vote against these newly proposed laws which would intensely violate citizens' rights to freedom of religion or belief
- adhere to the Russian constitution, as well as to the declarations that Russia has signed
- To release the innocent persons that are currently in prison due to their peaceful practice of their religion or belief

Best Regards,  
Human Rights Without Frontiers