

# ***Human Rights Without Frontiers Int'l***

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## **OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting**

Warsaw, 27 September 2016

### **Working Session 12 : Fundamental freedoms, including freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief**

#### **Russia: Jehovah's Witnesses under threat of liquidation**

##### **HRWF Int'l recommends to:**

*the Russian authorities*

- to recognize that Jehovah's Witnesses are non-violent and not extremist as they respect the beliefs of other people;
- to stop using the "Law on combating extremist activity" against them;
- to lift the ban on all their publications filed on the Federal List of Extremist Materials as their brochures do not pose any problem in any of the countries of the world where they are freely distributed;
- to respect their right to freedom of expression and to share their beliefs in the public space.

## **Persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia**

In the course of several years now, Russian authorities have been misusing the "Law on combating extremist activity" for restricting the peaceful activity of Jehovah's Witnesses. At the present time, more than 80 items published by Jehovah's Witnesses have been entered into the Federal List of Extremist Materials.

Law enforcement agencies of the Russian Federation mount ever more aggressive attempts to accuse of "extremism" a peaceful religious organization, officially registered in Russia.

On 10<sup>th</sup> March 2016, the Administrative Centre of Jehovah's Witnesses in St Petersburg received from Viktor Grin, Deputy General Prosecutor of the Russian Federation the formal warning "that engaging in extremist activity is not permitted". The warning is explicitly predicated on the alleged "extremist" activities of the local communities (and their members) which the Centre oversees and supports.

If dissolution of the Administrative Centre is pursued, it will be added to the federal list of extremist organisations, over 2500 congregations across Russia could also face prohibition of their activities and individuals could be vulnerable to criminal charges for expressing their beliefs.

On 24<sup>th</sup> August, law enforcement agencies conducted operational activities and discovered forbidden literature in two houses of worship of Jehovah's Witnesses: in Chapaevsk, Samara province, and in Budennovsk, Stavropol territory. The Jehovah's Witnesses are sure that the forbidden literature was planted on them.

In June, Russia's Supreme Court upheld on appeal the decision of the Belgorod Regional Court banning the Jehovah's Witnesses of Belgorod as extremist organization.

In May, the Krasnodar territorial court found to be legal a warning issued to Jehovah's Witnesses for distributing brochures that were not on the Federal List of Extremist Materials.

In April 2015 the prosecutor's office of Tikhoretsk issued a warning about the alleged extremist activity of the local congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses after one of its members was fined for distributing forbidden literature.

In March 2015, a court in Tyumen fined the organization 50,000 rubles (\$773) and seized prohibited literature.

In January 2014, a court in Kurgan ruled to ban the organization's booklets as extremist. The books talk about how to have a happy life, what you can hope for, how to develop good relations with God and what you should know about God and its meaning.

In the course of expert investigation, the Russian Ministry of Justice established that the religion of Jehovah's Witnesses does not represent any kind of danger or threat for public welfare. This has also been confirmed repeatedly by judicial decisions issued by the European Court of Human Rights.