

Human Rights Without Frontiers

Avenue d'Auderghem 61/16, 1040 Brussels

Phone/ Fax: 32 2 3456145

Email: international.secretariat.brussels@hrwf.net – Website: <http://www.hrwf.net>



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***MISUSE OF THE LAW ON RELIGIOUS
EXTREMISM IN RUSSIA***

***265 religious and faith-based organizations on a black list of extremist
organizations and 700 pieces of religious literature banned***

Human Rights Without Frontiers International

Avenue d'Auderghem 61/16

1040 Brussels, Belgium

Tel./ Fax: +32-2-3456145

Email: international.secretariat.brussels@hrwf.net

Website: <http://www.hrwf.net>

Misuse of the law on extremism in Russia

Human Rights Without Frontiers is concerned about the misuse of the law against religious extremism in Russia which has led to the prosecution of numerous peaceful groups which do not threaten public order, social peace or national security.

265 religious and faith-based organizations are on a black list of so-called extremist organizations.

A court in the far eastern town of Komsomolsk-on-Amur has ordered a local internet service provider to block access to the international Jehovah's Witness website <http://www.watchtower.org>. The court ruled that magazines posted in Russian on their website violate the integrity of the Russian Federation and "incite social, racial and religious discord".

A nationwide state campaign directed against Jehovah's Witnesses began in early 2009. It intensified when the Supreme Court upheld Rostov-on-Don Regional Court's earlier ruling which outlawed 34 Jehovah's Witness titles as extremist and dissolved the local Jehovah's Witness congregation in Taganrog.

Three criminal cases have already been opened against individual Jehovah's Witnesses in connection with alleged extremist activity, accusations the accused vigorously deny.

Similarly the target of a nationwide campaign are readers of the works of the Turkish Muslim theologian Said Nursi, many of whose works have also been placed on the Federal List of Extremist Materials.

The List, which runs around 700 titles, contains items whose preparation, distribution or storage with the intent of distribution is banned across Russia.

Human Rights Without Frontiers calls upon the Panel of Experts of the OSCE/ODIHR to carry out an in-depth expertise of this controversial law and its implementation.

Human Rights Without Frontiers recommends to the Russian authorities

- To revise Article 14 of the 1997 **Law on Freedom of conscience and association** which deals with the banning of the activities of a Religious Organization and their liquidation as several of its provisions are not necessary in a democratic society;
- To abrogate the 2002 **Law On Fighting Extremist Activity** as it is used and abused to restrict religious freedom, to repress and attempt to ban non-violent religious groups such as Jehovah's Witnesses;
- To establish clear guidelines for the implementation of Article 282 of the Criminal Code (incitement of national, racial or religious enmity) so as to stop the misuse of it in restricting the legitimate activities of religious communities (e.g. teaching the superiority of their doctrine over those of other religions);
- To reconsider cases against individuals and organizations which have been accused of extremism for conducting legitimate religious activities which are protected under international norms and laws;

- To put an end to the harassment of Jehovah's Witnesses (innumerable check ups, banning of their religious literature, accusations of extremism and religious enmity);
- To dissolve the Expert Council for Conducting State-Religious Studies under the Ministry of Justice as its powers have been unduly extended to limit the freedom of "non-traditional" religious movements and its members include activists of the Orthodox Church and anti-sect movements;
- To fully implement the decisions of the European Court.