

**EUROPEAN UNION****OSCE Permanent Council No. 1218
Vienna, 28 February 2019****EU Statement on Reports of Torture of Jehovah's
Witnesses in the Russian Federation**

The European Union continues to be deeply concerned about the situation of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia who are facing systemic persecution, including arbitrary detentions and criminal investigations. Furthermore, we are deeply concerned about recent reports of torture and other ill-treatment of people in detention in Siberia in the Russian Federation.

According to credible sources, on 15 February 2019 at least seven members of Jehovah's Witnesses were subjected to electric shocks, suffocation, and beatings after being detained by police officers at the office of the Russian Investigative Committee in Surgut. While at least three people are still detained, those who have been released are in the process of having their injuries documented by medical professionals and have filed complaints with supervisory agencies.

Torture and other ill-treatment are among the most abhorrent violations of human rights, human integrity and human dignity. It runs counter to international human rights law, in particular article 7 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights to which the Russian Federation is a State Party, and to the principle of ensuring human security, upon which the OSCE concept of comprehensive security is founded. Our OSCE and international commitments are abundantly clear: the prohibition of torture is absolute and unconditional. Torture is never allowed nor justified, under any circumstances. All participating States have an obligation to take effective measures to prevent acts of torture, prosecute perpetrators of such acts, identify victims and ensure effective redress.

We therefore call on the Russian Federation to conduct prompt, effective and thorough investigations into all reports of such acts, in order to ensure that anyone responsible or complicit is brought to justice. Furthermore, we call on the Russian

Federation to take effective measures to protect the victims and ensure effective redress.

Regrettably, these reports only add to the serious concerns raised multiple times by the EU and other participating States of the deteriorating situation of freedom of religion or belief for Jehovah's Witnesses in the Russian Federation. The EU will continue to raise its concerns regarding the human rights situation in the Russian Federation and expect a substantive response.

The Candidate Countries NORTH MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO* and ALBANIA*, the Country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and Potential Candidate BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA, and the EFTA countries ICELAND and NORWAY, members of the European Economic Area, as well as CANADA, UKRAINE, GEORGIA, ANDORRA, SAN MARINO and AUSTRALIA align themselves with this statement.

* North Macedonia, Montenegro and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.