



United States Mission to the OSCE
**On Allegations of Torture against
Jehovah's Witnesses Members Detained in
Russia**

As delivered by Chargé d'Affaires, a.i. Harry Kamian
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
February 28, 2019

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chair, the United States is gravely concerned by reports of torture committed by law enforcement officials against Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia. The Jehovah's Witnesses are a peaceful religious group that poses no threat to Russia's national security. Russia's Supreme Court ruling that the group constitutes a dangerous extremist organization is absurd. At least 50 Jehovah's Witnesses are under house arrest or imprisoned on charges of "extremism" that could lead to significant jail time.

We are deeply troubled by reports that in a series of early-morning raids in Surgut, Russia on February 15, police detained at least seven Jehovah's Witnesses, who subsequently claimed to have been subjected to torture.

Victims described beatings, electrocution, suffocation, and other vicious acts committed during interrogation. Some of those detained remain in custody.

Torture is forbidden in all places, at all times, with no exceptions. All OSCE participating States have made commitments and undertaken obligations to prevent torture and cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment.

We call on Russia to investigate allegations of torture by its authorities and to provide legal remedies to victims. We further call upon Russia to cease misusing its purported anti-terrorism and so-called anti-"extremism" legislation to target peaceful members of religious groups. Finally, we urge Russia to immediately release all prisoners held in detention for exercising their human rights, including the right to freedom of religion or belief, a right enshrined in the Russian constitution.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

###