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Enclosed information material is submitted by the European Association of Jehovah's Witnesses

European Association of Jehovah's Witnesses

Dennis Ole Christensen

Imprisoned in Russia for His Faith

Dennis Christensen, a Danish citizen, is the first one of Jehovah's Witnesses to be imprisoned in Russia for practising his faith since the fall of the Soviet Union. He is serving a six-year prison term for alleged extremist activity.



FACTS ABOUT THE CRIMINAL CASE

- Mr Christensen was arrested on 25 May 2017, when heavily armed police raided a religious meeting in Oryol.
- He was charged under Article 282.2 (1) of the Russian Federation Criminal Code for "organizing the activity of an extremist organization."
- The prosecution claimed that Mr Christensen was an "extremist" because he presented religious sermons, opened the gate to the local Kingdom Hall (house of worship), removed snow from the premises, and greeted and ushered fellow believers into the hall for worship.
- His attorneys contended that holding peaceful religious meetings is not a criminal offence in Russia. Although the Witnesses' legal entities have been liquidated throughout the country, Russian officials have maintained that this does not revoke the Witnesses' individual right to religious freedom. No one was victimised by his religious activity.
- On **23 May 2019**, Judge Aleksey Rudnev of the Zheleznodorozhniy District Court of Oryol pronounced him guilty and sentenced him to six years in prison.
- On 2 June 2017, Mr Christensen's attorneys filed an application with the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) concerning his pre-trial detention, which was communicated to the Russian government on 4 September 2017. Another application was filed with the ECHR on 20 August 2019 concerning his unjust conviction.

IN CUSTODY

On 6 June 2019, authorities transferred Mr Christensen from his pre-trial detention cell in Oryol to Penal Colony No. 3 in Lgov, Kursk Region. At the end of July, prison officials planted a knife in Mr Christensen's cell in an effort to pressure him to stop talking with his cell-mates about his faith, which is not prohibited by prison rules. In August, he was taken to Penal Colony No. 2 in Kursk for a few days for medical treatment, which he never received.

While in prison, he was visited by members of the Presidential Human Rights Council, Andrey Babushkin and Maria Bolshakova.

BACKGROUND

Dennis Christensen was born in Copenhagen, Denmark, in 1972. He was raised as one of Jehovah's Witnesses, and in 1989 he decided to get baptized as one of them. In 1991 he graduated from carpentry school, and in 1993 he earned a degree as a construction technician from the Haslev High School of Craftmanship, Denmark.

In 1995 he went to St Petersburg to volunteer on a construction project of Jehovah's Witnesses. He loved Russia and moved to Murmansk in 1999. There he met Irina, whom he married in 2002. In 2006 the Christensens moved to Oryol.

In Oryol, he was self-employed, specialising in construction and interior finishing. Dennis has a good relationship with his neighbours, and his colleagues and clients have only positive things to say about him.

RECOGNIZED AS A POLITICAL PRISONER

(21 July 2017, *Memorial Centre for Human Rights*)

RECOGNIZED AS A PRISONER OF CONSCIENCE

(26 September 2018, *U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom*)

60 prominent public figures in Russia signed a petition calling for the removal of the charges against Mr Christensen.

Dennis and Irina Christensen



Mr Christensen being escorted to trial



Statement by the
European Association of
Jehovah's Witnesses

OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting 2019, Warsaw