

Delegation of the Russian Federation

**STATEMENT BY MR. DMITRY BALAKIN,  
DEPUTY PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE  
RUSSIAN FEDERATION, AT THE 1143rd MEETING OF THE  
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

27 April 2017

**On the activities of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia**

Mr. Chairperson,

Indeed, on 20 April 2017 the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation recognized the international religious organization of Jehovah's Witnesses as extremist and ruled that its administrative centre and regional offices should be liquidated and its activities banned throughout Russia. Incidentally, the judgement has not yet entered into force.

We have already recently given explanations here on the merits of the matter. The decision was made on the basis of a legal action brought by the Russian Ministry of Justice. The Ministry repeatedly drew attention to the fact that the activities of the Jehovah's Witnesses organization violated the legislation of the Russian Federation, including in the field of countering extremism. According to the decision of the Russian courts, more than 90 brochures of the Jehovah's Witnesses and the activities of their eight regional branches are recognized as extremist. A year ago, the leadership of the organization was warned about the need to comply with the laws, but those requirements were ignored.

In accordance with Russian legislation, representatives of the Jehovah's Witnesses may appeal the decision to the appellate instance of the Supreme Court within a month. As far as we are aware, they are going to do that, and also to appeal to the European Court of Human Rights. So they retain the necessary procedural remedies.

We regard appeals for the revision of the decision as an attempt to put undue pressure on the independent judicial authority of a sovereign State.

Attempts by colleagues to present this case as an alleged attack on religious freedom in Russia are untenable. There are officially more than 60 religions in our country and around 25,000 religious organizations registered. In this case, registration is required only for those who conduct financial activities or have property. No formal documents are needed to unite for prayer. There are tens of thousands of such groups in Russia, including Jehovah's Witnesses, who continue to freely profess their faith.

Colleagues, have you read the literature distributed by the Jehovah's Witnesses? Here is one of many quotes of this kind: Political peoples who challenge the universal rule of Jehovah must be destroyed... Because the state of the modern world poses an unambiguous question: either the destruction of politically engaged peoples, or the destruction of all mankind (*The Watchtower*, New York, 1971, p.12). These are actually calls for genocide!

Russia has always advocated the protection of freedom of religion. However, such freedom should not be used to carry out or justify extremist activity. In this regard, we are very disappointed that such important OSCE institutions as the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights and the Personal Representative of the Chairperson-in-Office on Combating Racism, Xenophobia and Discrimination, also Focusing on Intolerance and Discrimination against Christians and Members of Other Religions, are condoning, judging by their recent statement, such phenomena. And this is especially alarming in the absence of any reaction from Mr. Michael Georg Link and Ms. Ingeborg Gabriel, for example, to the persecution of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate in Ukraine, as well as to numerous manifestations of hatred and harassment of Christians in other OSCE countries.

Thank you for your attention.