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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Disputed Books Look Set to Stay at Jewish Museum

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Russia's Culture Ministry said it is in talks with Moscow's Jewish Museum and Tolerance Center to give the center permanent control over a large collection of books from a prominent family of rabbis that has been the subject of legal battles for decades.

Deputy Culture Minister Gregory Ivliev told reporters Monday that his ministry was ready to give the museum, which currently stores more than 4,500 books from the Orthodox Jewish Schneerson family, permanent control of the volumes if they guarantee their preservation, Itar-Tass reported.

Ivliyev's announcement follows last week's Moscow Arbitration Court ruling that the U.S. must return seven rare books that have been on loan to the U.S. Library of Congress, adding that the U.S. should pay $50,000 for each day that the books are not given back.

The Culture Ministry will await a response and possible appeal of the ruling before seeking to enforce it, Ivliev said, RIA Novosti reported.

The court ruling marks the latest volley in the legal back and forth over the collection set up by Yosef Schneerson, a leader of the Chabad-Lubavitch movement who was born in the Russian Empire and imprisoned by Soviet authorities before fleeing to Poland and later New York City, where he died in 1950.

The last several decades have seen both U.S. and Russian court cases between Russian authorities and U.S. Chabad Lubavitch leaders who insist that the whole collection, part of which was nationalized by the Soviet Union and part of which was taken from Nazi Germany and is held in the Russian military archives, should be given to the religious movement in New York.

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