

Jehovah's Witnesses Banned as 'Extremist' in Russian Region

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The Supreme Court approved Russia's first region-wide ban of the Jehovah's Witnesses religious group, deeming them "extremist," Interfax said.

The ruling, passed Wednesday, had been the group's final hope of stalling the ban in the Samara region, which first passed by a regional court in May, but was later appealed.

The Jehovah's Witnesses can still appeal to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg, but have not indicated whether they plan to do so.

The ban owes to "extremist" literature having been found at the regional branch of the Jehovah's Witnesses, the prosecutors were cited as saying.

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Most were blacklisted on allegations of having fanned "religious hatred" by criticizing other branches of Christianity.

While this is the first region-wide ban on Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia, Moscow and the southern city of Taganrog have previously imposed bans against the group's city branches based on claims of extremism in 2004 and 2009, respectively.

The religious community was the target of an organized state crackdown in 2009 and 2010, when most of the bans were passed, rights activists said at the time.

Critics linked the campaign to the Russian Orthodox Church, which tends to take a dim view of new religious sects emerging in Russia.

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