The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Russian Court Denounces Jehovah's Witnesses as 'Extremist'

March 04, 2015



Nearly 70 Jehovah's Witnesses publications are included among the federal list of extremist materials.

A court in southern Russia has denounced a local organization of Jehovah's Witnesses as "extremist" and ordered it disbanded, the Interfax news agency reported Wednesday, in the latest in a long line of such rulings issued to the religious group in Russia.

The group's building and surrounding land will be confiscated by the local government in the town of Abinsk, Krasnodar region, the court ruled.

The group had been distributing publications titled "Humanity in Search of God" and "What Does the Bible Really Teach?" that were included in the federal list of extremist materials and are banned for distribution in the country, the news report said.

The local group's founders — Igor Soroka and Albert Belikov — were already fined for distributing banned literature in 2010 and 2012, respectively.

Nearly 70 Jehovah's Witnesses publications are included among the federal list of extremist

materials. Most were blacklisted on allegations of inciting religious hatred by criticizing other branches of Christianity.

The group's lawyers have called the court's decision ungrounded and unconstitutional, and they plan to file an appeal with Russia's Supreme Court.

Last December the Supreme Court ruled that a Jehovah's Witnesses website and three of the movement's religious texts are extremist. Earlier in November it approved the Samara region's decision to ban the group.

While that was the first region-wide ban on Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia, Moscow and the southern city of Taganrog previously imposed bans against local groups based on claims of extremism in 2004 and 2009, respectively.

The Abinsk Jehovah's Witnesses organization was founded in 1999 and consists of 11 members. There are about 200 followers of the organization in Abinsk in total, Interfax reported.

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