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Prosecutors Say the Archpriest Who Compared Atheists to 'Circus Bears' Didn't Break Any Laws

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Prosecutors in Penza are refusing to charge the local Russian Orthodox diocese with extremism after Archpriest Dmitry Smirnov compared atheists to circus bears, according to the RIA Novosti agency.

Previously, a lawyer in Penza appealed to police, demanding criminal charges against Smirnov for the statement, which the lawyer says qualifies as extremism.

In February 2015, the diocese published a transcript of a meeting between Smirnov and other clergy members, where the archpriest said, "Being married to an atheist is no different from being married to a circus bear. A bear is the kind of animal you've got to throw out after three years... That's why it's dangerous to marry this sort."

The complaint against Smirnov's comments was filed in June this year. In September, prosecutors determined that the comparison was not extremist in nature, refusing to open a

misdemeanor case and declining even to consider a criminal investigation.

Earlier this year, a judge in Stavropol institutionalized a man named Viktor Krasnov in a psychiatric hospital against his will after he wrote the words "There is no God" in an online forum. Krasnov also called the Bible a "collection of Jewish fairy tales."

A law prohibiting public insults to the feelings of religious people has been on the books in Russia since July 1, 2013.

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