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American Missionary Loses Appeal Against Anti-Terror Law

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An American missionary has lost his appeal after being prosecuted under Russia's controversial new anti-terrorism laws.

Don Ossewaarde, an independent Baptist, was fined 40,000 rubles ($616) for carrying out "illegal missionary work" in August.

He was first arrested when police broke up a Sunday prayer meeting at Ossewaarde's home in the small Russian city of Oryol, where the American has worked for over 14 years.

Ossewaarde told The Moscow Times that his lawyer had expected to lose the appeal, despite having a strong case in his favor.

He is now set to appeal further and pledged that he would take his case to the highest levels of the Russian justice system.

“I have decided that I am going to leave Russia [after the case],” he said. “I am sure they [the government] would like me to pay the fine and quietly return to America."

“But I am doing this on behalf of other foreigners and Russians who want to exercise their religious rights.”

Sweeping anti-terror laws signed by Russian President Vladimir Putin in June restricted where and how religious missionary work can take place within Russia.

Originally designed to combat radical Islamist preachers, the legislation requires anyone taking part in a broad definition of missionary work to be formally affiliated with registered organizations or groups and work within specially designated areas, such as religious buildings.

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