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Russian Orthodox Church Labels Scientology a 'Brutal, Totalitarian Sect'

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Denis Abramov / Vedomosti

The Russian Orthodox Church has called Scientology a "brutal, totalitarian sect" and accused it of being nothing more than a structure to defraud people out of money, the Rosbalt news agency reported Wednesday.

A representative for the missionary department of the St. Petersburg diocese, Archpriest Georgy Ioffe, said during a press conference on Wednesday that all the Church of Scientology's methods were completely artificial and were created purely "to drain money from people."

He said "quite a large number of people" had come to the St. Petersburg diocese, having suffered at the hands of the U.S.-based Church of Scientology.

Darya Varnovskaya, who spent spent time in St. Petersburg's Church of Scientology, reported its weekly revenue as between three and four million rubles ($48,000-64,000), Rosbalt

reported.

According to the news agency, Varnovskaya suspects the true figure is much higher, claiming the church's international administration expects its St. Petersburg branch to earn 6 million rubles ($96,000) a week.

The church's staff earned just 10,000 rubles ($160) and faced "disciplinary action" if they were unable to carry out "the plan," she said.

Chairman of the Legal Committee of the Russian Association of Centers for the Study of Religions and Sects, Alexander Korelov, told Rosbalt that the Church of Scientology was "a typical example of an organized criminal organization using religion as a cover."

Korelov claims the church defrauded victims out of "billions of rubles" through housing cooperatives in Moscow and St. Petersburg in schemes that were "centrally run."

Russia's Justice Ministry has previously attempted to prohibit the organization, a recognized religion in some countries but considered by many others to be a cult.

Arrests were made in June when police raided the Church's offices in Moscow and St. Petersburg in connection with illegal business dealings in the latter city.

A Moscow City Court in November last year ruled to liquidate an organization calling itself the "Moscow Scientology Church" as the trademark "Scientology" was already registered to the U.S.-based Religious Technology Center.

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