

Jehovah's Witnesses Not Victims of Repression, Says Russia's Supreme Court

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Misha Japaridze / AP

Russia's Supreme Court has [refused to recognize](#) the country's Jehovah's Witnesses as victims of political repression.

The religious group appealed to the court as part of an ongoing case which could see the organization banned in Russia as "extremist."

The ruling would leave Russia's 175,000 Jehovah's Witnesses unable to meet or distribute literature legally, classifying the group alongside organizations like the Islamic State and al-Qaeda.

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Russia's Justice Ministry first [petitioned](#) the Supreme Court to ban the organization on March 17.

The initial case targeted the Jehovah's Witnesses central headquarters near St. Petersburg, which was issued an official warning to halt "extremist activity" in early 2016.

Prosecutors later expanded the case to all 396 registered Jehovah's Witnesses organizations in Russia, including 22 groups in Crimea.

The move had been condemned both by the [U.S. government](#) and the United Nations, which accuse the Kremlin of misusing the country's anti-terrorism laws.

"The use of counter-extremism legislation in this way to confine freedom of opinion, including religious belief, expression and association to that which is state-approved is unlawful and dangerous, and signals a dark future for all religious freedom in Russia," the [UN Human Rights Commission said in a statement](#).

The Islamic State and al-Qaeda are terrorist groups banned in Russia.

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