

Russian Investigators Launch Extremism Probe Against Suspected Jehovah's Witnesses Leader

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Russian investigators have opened a criminal probe against a man suspected of being a Jehovah's Witnesses leader in the Far East, amid an ongoing crackdown on the religious group that has been labeled as extremist in Russia.

Russia [outlawed](#) Jehovah's Witnesses in 2017, equating the country's estimated 175,000 adherents to members of a terrorist group, making it illegal for them to congregate or distribute literature. In October, investigators [claimed](#) to have seized explosives from members of the religious group in the Volga region of Kirov — a claim that a spokesperson for the group denied.

Related article: [Russia Outlaws Jehovah's Witnesses](#)

Russia's Investigative Committee [announced](#) Tuesday that a criminal case had been opened against a 34-year-old man in the city of Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky on suspicion that he had organized the activities of a banned extremist organization.

According to law enforcement agencies, the 34-year-old Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky resident had organized secret meetings "at least twice a week" in which he taught locals about the organization and distributed "extremist literature."

On December 3, local police say they searched the apartment of the suspect as well as the gathering place of the banned organization, where they said they found evidence that implicated the man.

The Jehovah's Witnesses are a Christian religious group with roughly 8.2 million members worldwide. Their faith differs notably from mainstream Christianity in several ways, with many members believing that Armageddon is imminent.

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