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Russian Jehovah's Witness Hit With 6-Year 'Extremism' Sentence

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Sergei Klimov **tv2.today**

Russia has imprisoned a Jehovah's Witness from Siberia to six years in prison on charges of "extremism," the independent Tayga.info news website reported Tuesday.

Sergei Klimov was detained in the city of Tomsk in June 2018 on suspicion of being an "de facto leader" of a local branch of Jehovah's Witnesses. Russia outlawed the Jehovah's Witnesses in 2017, making it a criminal offense for the group's estimated 175,000 worshippers living in the country to meet or distribute literature.

Related article: 6 Jehovah's Witnesses Jailed For 'Extremism' in Russia

The Oktyabrsky district court of Tomsk found Klimov guilty of "organizing a banned extremist network" and sentenced him to six years in a penal colony, Tayga.info reported, citing Klimov's lawyer. Prosecutors had requested a seven-year sentence.

According to prosecutors, Klimov from April 2017-June 2018 had recruited new members to the religious group and gathered them in a community member's house for meetings. He was accused of collecting donations and spreading "propaganda" which encouraged members to refuse medical treatments.

Klimov "undermined the foundations of the constitutional order and security of the state" with his actions, the court's decision obtained by Tayga.info read. Klimov's lawyer maintains that the meetings his client led were private, and Klimov himself says his right to worship as a Jehovah's Witness is guaranteed by the Russian constitution, the tv2.today news website reported.

In addition to the prison sentence, Klimov will be banned from taking part in educational activities and from posting on the internet for five years. He will also be barred from attending cultural and entertainment events or traveling outside Tomsk for one year.

In late September, a court in southern Russia found six Jehovah's Witnesses guilty of "extremism" and sentenced them to prison terms between two and three and a half years. They had been swept up in mass nationwide raids in mid-2018 on suspicion of organizing, participating in or financing an "extremist organization."

Human rights groups have condemned law enforcement raids against the group as violations of religious freedom.

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