

St. Petersburg Scientology Leader Released 2 Years Into Arrest

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Court Press Service

A court in St. Petersburg has ordered the release of a Church of Scientology leader from pretrial custody two years after he was arrested, the Russian city's court system [announced](#) Friday.

Ivan Matsitsky was among five people taken into custody on extremism, illegal entrepreneurship and incitement charges during a 2017 [raid](#) on the church's St. Petersburg headquarters. The U.S. government has labeled Matsitsky and a Danish Jehovah's Witness [convicted](#) on extremism charges as religious prisoners of conscience.

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The St. Petersburg City Court ruled Friday to release Matsitsky on bail.

At Friday's hearing, investigators had blamed Matsitsky's lawyers for "disorganizing" their

work and asked the court to extend his custody until Feb. 19.

Russia has previously attempted to prohibit the Church of Scientology, a religion that is recognized in some countries but considered by others to be a cult.

The Church of Scientology's Moscow branch was disbanded in 2015 after a court found that the group had failed to meet the requirements for operating as a recognized religious organization.

Arrests were made in 2016 when police raided the church's offices in Moscow and St. Petersburg in connection with illegal business dealings in the latter city.

Authorities [continued](#) the Scientology raids in both cities in 2019, alleging that the church may have transferred large sums raised during seminars and training sessions held without a license to its U.S. headquarters.

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