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Russian Court in Crimea Jails Jehovah's Witness for 6 Years

By AFP

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The Christian movement said it will appeal the ruling. **Alexander Demianchuk/TASS**

A court in Russian-annexed Crimea on Thursday sentenced a Jehovah's Witness to six years in prison for organizing an extremist organisation, in the latest harsh sentence against the Christian movement.

Crimea's Supreme Court at an appeal hearing sentenced Artyom Gerasimov to six years in a penal colony, the Jehovah's Witnesses religious organization said in a statement, adding that the defence will mount a further appeal against the ruling.

In 2017, Russia listed the group as an extremist organization and it has since issued a series of long sentences against believers including a Danish citizen, Dennis Christensen, who was given a six-year term in February 2019.

Jarrod Lopes, spokesman for Jehovah’s Witnesses, said that Thursday's ruling by the Crimean

Supreme Court brought "religious persecution to a new level of cruelty".

"Since the 2017 Russian Supreme Court's ruling that effectively banned Jehovah's Witnesses, this is the first time an appeal has resulted in a more severe punishment," he said in a statement.

Gerasimov was initially fined in March by a court in the Black Sea city of Yalta while another believer who stood trial with him, Sergei Filatov, was jailed for six years.

Investigators said a group of believers held religious services which was classified as extremist activity.

Prosecutors filed an appeal after, asking for Gerasimov to serve a six and a half year term.

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