

Russia Grants Early Release to Jailed Danish Jehovah's Witness

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Dennis Christensen was the first Jehovah's Witness to be convicted on extremism charges in Russia.
Courtesy of Jehovah's Witnesses

A court in western Russia has granted early release to the first Jehovah's Witness to be convicted on extremism charges in the country, the religious group [said](#) Tuesday.

Danish national Dennis Christensen was arrested in May 2017 at a prayer meeting in the town of Oryol south of Moscow and sentenced in 2019 for six years. Critics condemned Christensen's jailing as an attack on religious freedom.

Related article: [Russian Court Convicts Danish Jehovah's Witness to 6 Years for 'Extremism'](#)

A district court in Kursk ordered Christensen to pay a fine of 400,000 rubles (\$5,800) in lieu of his remaining prison sentence. The organization said Christensen will go free after the court ruling comes into force.

“Judge Galina Petliza issued the right decision,” said Yaroslav Sivulsky, a representative of the European Association of Jehovah's Witnesses.

“This is a bold and honest act, which Russian judges who hear Jehovah's Witnesses cases don't often dare to commit,” Sivulsky said.

The Jehovah's Witnesses spokesman at its U.S. headquarters Jarrod Lopes called the fine imposed on Christensen “unconscionable, after Dennis' harrowing experiences in prison.”

“Today's ruling also does not erase the fact that Dennis, a peaceful Christian believer, still has to bear the unjust stigma of being convicted as an extremist,” Lopes said in a statement.

Russia outlawed the Jehovah's Witnesses as an “extremist” organization in April 2017 and has since issued a series of lengthy sentences against believers.

The Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia organization said 10 worshippers are currently serving time in Russian penal colonies and 24 are in pre-trial detention. More than 350 Jehovah's Witnesses face criminal charges.

The religious group's U.S. headquarters criticized Russia's crackdown on the Jehovah's Witnesses for disregarding its own Constitution, which guarantees freedom of religion, as well as international human rights law.

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