

Russia Sentences 3 Jehovah's Witnesses to 6 Years in Prison

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Russia declared the Christian denomination extremist in 2017. **Alexander Artemenkov / TASS**

A Russian district court in the southern city of Rostov-on-Don sentenced three Jehovah's Witnesses to six years in prison on extremism charges on Thursday, the religious organization told The Moscow Times in an emailed statement.

Alexander Parkov and Arsen Avanesov were sentenced to six and a half years, and Vilen Avanesov to six years in prison. All three had pleaded "not guilty."

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In 2017, the Russian Supreme Court declared the Christian denomination extremist and banned all of its activities. Since the designation, 51 followers are currently in prison, 33 have been sentenced to a prison term and 34 remain under house arrest, according to the Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia [website](#).

Spokesman for the European Association of Jehovah's Witnesses Yaroslav Sivulsky called the extremism sentences "groundless."

"Since the Supreme Court did not prohibit professing the faith of Jehovah's Witnesses individually or in community with others, the ban applies exclusively to legal entities, but not to the faith itself," he said in the statement.

Extremist activity includes "propaganda of the exclusivity, superiority or inferiority of a person on the basis of his social, racial, national, religious or linguistic affiliation or attitude to religion" according to the language in the 2017 ruling.

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