

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	570
Land:	Rusland
Kilde:	Human Rights Watch
Titel:	Persecution Against Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia Escalates
Udgivet:	29. oktober 2019
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	24. januar 2020

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OCTOBER 29, 2019 4:42PM EDT DISPATCHES

Persecution Against Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia Escalates

Camp Raid the Latest in Deepening Crackdown on Members

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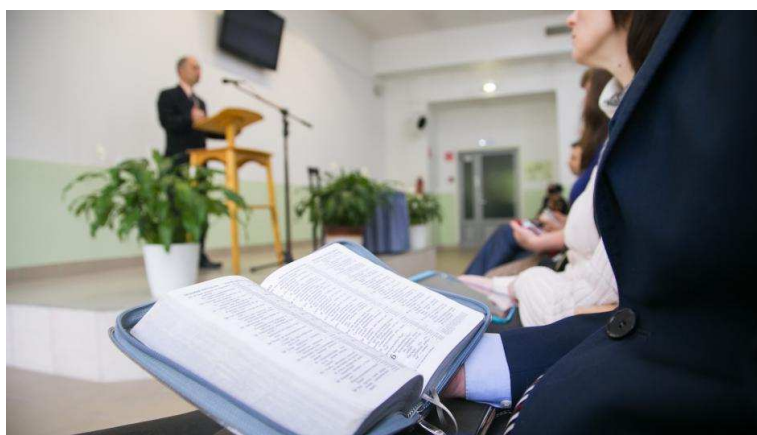
[TanyaLokshina](#)

Last week, police near Norilsk, in northern Russia, raided a campsite where more than 50 Jehovah's Witness followers had gathered to pray. It was the latest example of an escalating crackdown on Jehovah's Witnesses, who are targeted simply for practicing their faith.

Members of the Jehovah's Witness community who are close to those who were at the campsite told

Human Rights Watch that 15 armed and masked special operations police stormed loudly into the camp, photographed worshippers, and forced them to hand over all electronic devices and write down their passcodes.

The officers loaded many worshippers into minivans and took them to the state criminal investigation agency in Norilsk, where they were interrogated for several hours about their religion, who the elders – or spiritual leaders – are, and where they hold their meetings. On the same day, law enforcement officers also searched at least five homes of Jehovah's Witnesses in Norilsk, seizing bibles, tablets,



Raids, arrests against Jehovah's Witnesses are escalating in Russia

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and computers. Three days later, on October 23, the Krasnoyarsk Investigative Committee confirmed it had opened a criminal case against the leader of the local Jehovah's Witness community.

In April 2017, Russia's Supreme Court designated the Jehovah's Witnesses Administrative Center an extremist organization, banning the group's activities throughout the country and liquidating all 395 Jehovah's Witnesses branches in Russia. Since then, the community has faced numerous waves of raids, arrests, and interrogations. According to the Jehovah's Witness organization, 275 Jehovah's Witnesses have been or are under investigation, 44 are in detention, including some of the 10 who have been convicted on extremism charges, and another 25 are under house arrest. More than 700 of their homes have been raided by law enforcement officers.

In February, Dennis Christensen, a Danish citizen and Jehovah's Witness, was sentenced to six years in prison in Orel. A week later, police in Surgut arrested and tortured seven Jehovah's Witnesses. Last week, the state prosecutor's office in Tomsk demanded a seven-year sentence for Sergei Klimov, who was detained in 2018 for holding and conducting meetings of Jehovah's Witnesses.

All of these people were accused of nothing more than peacefully practicing their faith. In December 2018, President Putin explicitly said that people of different faiths should be treated equally. We are still waiting to hear him call on prosecutors to withdraw extremism charges against Jehovah's Witnesses and uphold freedom of religion.

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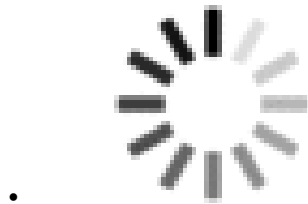
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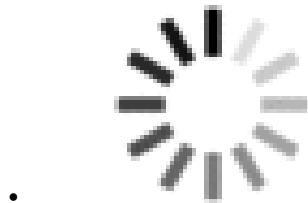
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[6] <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/02/06/russia-jehovahs-witness-convicted>

[7] <https://meduza.io/en/news/2019/02/21/new-details-emerge-on-reported-torture-of-jehovah-s-witnesses>

[8] <https://tayga.info/149556>

[9] <https://ria.ru/20181217/1548139702.html>

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