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(from "Rise, Let Us Be On Our Way" by John Paul II)

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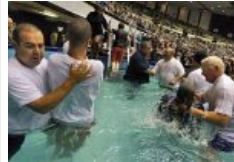
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>> 09/17/2009 13:13
RUSSIA

Court in Rostov bans Jehovah's Witnesses for being religious extremists

The court disbands the organisation, seizes its assets and bans all of its activities in the cities of Taganrog, Neklinov and Matveevo-Kurgan. The religious movement accuses the judges of violating religious freedom, and is set to appeal to the European Court of Human Rights.



Moscow (AsiaNews/Agencies) - A provincial court in Rostov ruled that Jehovah's Witnesses in the city of Taganrog are religious extremists and that they must be banned from the province (oblast). The court disbanded the organisation, seized its assets and banned it from carrying out any activities in Taganrog, Neklinov and Matveevo-Kurgan. The court's decision, which was made public last Friday, found that 34 different publications taken together constituted "extremist material".

Jehovah's Witnesses claim a membership of about 200,000 people in Russia. Over the decades, they have been accused of being sectarian and hostile to the Russian Federation.

Certain motives have been used in order to criticise or take legal action against the religious group. In Russia since the start the 20th century, Jehovah's Witnesses are in favour of conscientious objection against the military, reject the use of weapons, are opposed to blood transfusions and demand their members to be totally devoted to the community.

According to the court in Rostov, the publications entered as evidence urge members to live according to "religious extremist" principles. The Prosecutor General of the Russian Federation described these principles earlier this year as an incitement to social isolation and behaviours that raise negative attitudes in the population and against Russia's traditional religions.

The court ruling will come into effect on 21 September, ending a case that began on 11 July of last year. It is not however the only one in which Jehovah's Witnesses have to defend themselves against charges of handing out extremist literature.

In fact, cases have been filed against the religious group in other parts of the Russian Federation. Trials that could lead to a ban are currently under way in Salsk (Rostov Oblast), Gorno-Altai (Altai Republic), Krasnodar (Krasnodar Oblast), Samara (Samara Oblast), Vladikavkaz (Republic of North Ossetia-Alania) and Yekaterinburg (Sverdlovsk Oblast).

Jehovah's Witnesses have responded to the accusations and legal proceedings brought against them by saying that local and federal authorities are pursuing a policy of discrimination that violates the basic principles of religious freedom.

In order to defend themselves and avoid dissolution in various provinces, they plan to appeal to the European Court of Human rights, as they have done in the past.

They argue that such charges have no legal basis under EU law and that they contradict the principles on which Russian cooperation with countries like the United States and Germany against religious extremism is based.

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by Bernardo Cervellera



Attacks on religious freedom and violence against Christians embrace nearly all

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by J.B. An Dang



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