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Court supports Russian Jehovah's Witnesses

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STRASBOURG, France, June 10 (UPI) -- The European Court of Human Rights says a ruling by a Russian court to dissolve the Moscow branch of the Jehovah's Witnesses was illegal.

The court ordered Russia to pay \$85,000 to members of the movement, RIA Novosti reported Wednesday.

A Moscow district court banned the activities of the organization, which Russia considers a sect, in 2004, saying it encouraged younger members to disown families and neglect civic duties.

Ruling on a countersuit by the Christian-based organization, the European court in Strasbourg, France, said the Russian judgment was based on insufficient grounds and its ruling was "too strict a measure."

Russia has three months to appeal the Court of Human Rights ruling.

The Jehovah's Witnesses, founded in the United States at the end of the 19th century, has an estimated 7 million members worldwide. About 300,000 have already been banned in several former Soviet republics, RIA Novosti reported.

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