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 RUSSIA

**More than 50 Jehovah's Witnesses arrested in Russia for taking part in a public protest**

Some 150,000 volunteers hand out about 12 million leaflets slamming the persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses, guilty of rejecting to military service and unfriendliness towards other religious groups. For their part, the Witnesses say that history is repeating itself with a return to Soviet-style persecution.



Moscow (AsiaNews/Agencies) – Between late February and early March, Russian police arrested at least 50 Jehovah's Witnesses for handing out leaflets that describe how their religious freedom is curtailed. They are especially critical of the way their communities are being persecuted, labelled extremist and criminal for refusing the military draft.

On 26 February, the group's national body launched a campaign to raise awareness about the violence Jehovah's Witnesses encounter in many republics of the Russian Federation. It brought together almost 150,000 volunteers in the streets of Moscow, Rostov, Sverdlovsk, Nizhny Novgorod, Omsk, Krasnodar, and Volgograd. Protesters handed out leaflets in railway as well as subway stations and at bus stops. Titled 'Is history repeating itself? A question for Russians', the four-page flyer quoted extensively from President Dmitry Medvedev's speeches in which the Russian leader condemns political repression based on religion. Distributed to the tune of 12 million copies, the leaflet noted that the post-Soviet rehabilitation of Jehovah's Witnesses had "turned to dust."

Fifteen years ago, many veteran Jehovah's Witnesses received a special "certificate of rehabilitation." Now the same people, certificates in their pocket, are being charged as "extremists," forced to go underground.

According to Lev Levinson, director of the Institute for Human Rights, the current persecution is the by-product of a perverse interpretation of anti-extremism laws.

As a religious group, Jehovah's Witnesses are accused of being a "sect", of being unfriendly towards other Churches, of rejecting military service, this despite the fact that Russia's constitution allows for an alternative civilian service.

In their defence, Jehovah's Witnesses say that they are being forced to organise their campaign because various courts in Russia have banned their publications and outlawed their activities (see "Court in Rostov bans Jehovah's Witnesses for being religious extremists," in *AsiaNews*, 17 September 2009, and "Altai court condemns Jehovah's Witnesses for "extremism," in *AsiaNews*, 5 October 2009)

Before that, they had turned to President Medvedev asking for justice (see "Jehovah's Witnesses write to Medvedev, tell him they are persecuted like in Soviet times," in *AsiaNews*, 13 November 2009), but now must try to move public opinion.

Following the latest incident, Jehovah's Witnesses were interrogated after their arrest, their leaflets seized. Most of them were eventually released after a few hours.

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Editor's choices

INDIA

**Muslim women can move forwards wearing the veil**  
 by Asghar Ali Engineer



A few days ago, Muslims in Karnataka took to the streets to protest the publication of an article against the Islamic veil by the 'Kannada Prabha' newspaper, ostensibly by well know writer Taslima Nasreen. Because of her liberal views on Islam, she has been living in exile for the past 16 years. The unrest left two people dead, and 50 injured; it also caused anger and fear among the State's Hindu population. Asghar Ali Engineer, a Muslim and head of the Centre for Study of Society and Secularism, tells Indians about the struggle Muslim women are engaged in for their rights. He accuses Indian newspapers of distorting reality, something that is preventing a real reform of Islam.

ISLAM

**Women, equality and Islam: Rethinking the faith to meet the expectations of modern man**  
 by Samir Khalil Samir, SJ



It is the only way to overcome the contrast between the verses of the Koran and sayings of the Sunna (tradition) of Prophet of Islam that sometimes do not point in the same direction. Some praise women or speak neutrally about them, others say they are temptresses and that hell is populated by women. Also, some verses speak of equality between men and women, some of inequality. Today the question is a juridical rather than cultural one.

VATICAN - CHINA

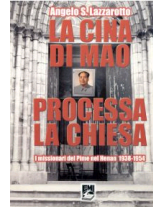
**Mgr Nugent: Would like to visit each China bishop in communion with the Pope**  
 by Annie Lam



After ten years of China Church work, the representative of the Holy See is set to leave to take up the post of nuncio to Madagascar. He will be consecrated on 18 March, by Card Bertone. In this interview, he looks back at his work and the life of the Church in China. Main moments include the witness of the persecuted Christians, the unity of the Church, diplomatic relations between China and the Vatican, the appeal on behalf of imprisoned bishops and priests,

BOOKS

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and the openness of some  
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*tra mercato e repressione*  
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