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Siberian Jehovah's Witnesses appeal 'extremism' verdict



Alexander Kalistratov. Files

14:00 14/11/2011

© REUTERS/ Alexandr Tyrryshkin

GORNO-ALTAYSK, November 14 (RIA Novosti)

Tags: [Jehovah's Witnesses](#), [Alexander Kalistratov](#), [Gorno-Altaysk](#), [Russia](#)

The head of a south Siberian branch of the Jehovah's Witnesses is appealing a ruling that labelled his activities "extremist," a court spokesperson said on Monday.

Alexander Kalistratov, the head of the Jehovah's Witnesses in the Altai Republic capital of Gorno-Altaysk, was found guilty after he distributed 48 religious articles of "a strongly extremist nature." The court says the articles were aimed at discrediting other religions.

He was sentenced to 100 hours of community service. The same court had acquitted Kalistratov in April, but the republic's Supreme Court ordered a new trial at the request of the prosecutor's office.

Kalistratov is appealing the new decision at the republic's Supreme Court.

The Jehovah's Witnesses is an international organization, with some 7 million members worldwide.

The case is not the first time the authorities in Russia have acted against the Jehovah's Witnesses. In June 2010, a court in Komsomolsk-na-Amur ordered the blocking of a website operated by the group, claiming it violated the integrity of the Russian Federation and incited social, racial and religious discord."

Human Rights Without Frontiers (HRWF) and other organizations have criticized Russia's 2002 law on religious extremism, claiming it has "led to the prosecution of

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numerous peaceful groups with do not threaten public order, social peace or national security.”

HRWF says 265 religious and faith-based organizations are on a blacklist of so-called extremist groups in Russia.

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