

Hi, Jean-Philippe | Sign Out | Help

Yahoo! Mail

YAHOO! NEWS

Search

Web Search

HOME U.S. BUSINESS WORLD ENTERTAINMENT SPORTS TECH POLITICS SCIENCE HEALTH OPINION MOST POPULAR

Video Photos The Upshot The Starting Point Local Odd News Comics Weather Travel Vitality Who Knew? Weekend Edition

Search All News

News Search

TRENDING NOW: [iron man 3](#) [wikileaks](#) [hulk hogan](#) [nicole richie](#) [russia](#) [heidi jones](#)

Go further with one search. [Space Shuttle Launch](#) [Search Now](#) **YAHOO!**

Roll over to watch video >>

WEEKEND EDITION: The latest health, leisure, travel and fitness news [J'aime](#) 300

Russia uses extremism law to target dissenters

 **REUTERS**

Buzz up! 0 votes

Share

retweet 1

Email

Print

By Alissa de Carbonnel . Thu Dec 16, 6:01 am ET

MOSCOW (Reuters) . When armed Russian security officers forced their way into Alexander Kalistratov's home, he hardly imagined they were after his books.

The local leader of a congregation of [Jehovah's Witnesses](#) in Siberia now faces up to two years in prison if found guilty this week of inciting religious hatred for distributing literature about his beliefs.

"They swept everything from my shelves without even bothering to sort it, even my bible," Kalistratov, a street sweeper, said by telephone from the Siberian town of Gorno-Altaysk, 3,600 km (2,200 miles) east of Moscow.

His trial is the first of a dozen pending against Jehovah's Witnesses and scores of others caught up in the widening net of criminal prosecutions brought under Russia's anti-extremism law.

[Rights activists](#) say the vaguely worded legislation, first passed in 2002, is increasingly being exploited by the authorities to persecute religious minorities, intimidate the media and clamp down on [opposition activists](#).

"This law is used by various officials for their own personal aims," said Alexander Verkhovsky, whose SOVA rights group monitors hate crimes, extremism and religious freedoms.

"In practice, it's a universal tool. It can be used to target anybody ... political, religious or even completely apolitical groups such as labor union activists."

The law -- ostensibly aimed at combating potential terrorist threats -- was used earlier this year to fine two prominent Moscow curators a combined 350,000 roubles (\$11,300) over an controversial Pop Art exhibition in Moscow and to impose a ban on the popular Internet portal YouTube in [Russia's](#) Far East.

ORTHODOX CHURCH PRIVILEGED

In the case against Kalistratov, activists say local authorities are really aiming at cracking down on groups that are frowned upon by the Russian Orthodox Church.

The Church has undergone a revival since the fall of the [Soviet Union](#) ended decades of repression under Communism, and has traditionally occupied a privileged place in Russia, with strong ties to the state.

It has repeatedly complained that other churches are poaching converts in its territory.

"I have no doubt this is a centralized campaign," Verkhovsky said. "Some high-placed leader has given the order to persecute a particular group."

Prosecutors can move fast to outlaw texts, which are then included in the Federal List of Extremist Materials -- an ever-growing catalog that ran to over 50 pages in its latest print version.

The ban on Jehovah's Witnesses' basic texts has spurred over 150 police detentions and searches in a three-month period alone, according to SOVA.

"We remember what happened to Jehovah's Witnesses in the Soviet-era, in the 50s, when some 1,000 were exiled to Siberia. Now it seems this is all being repeated," said Grigory Martynov, a spokesman for the group, which has about 162,000 followers in Russia.

Moscow-based religious affairs analyst Geraldine Fagan said innocuous material was being defined as extremist.

"In some cases, it's quite farcical," she said. "If the texts say that their faith is the best or the truest, then that is understood as extremist. But that is an integral part of any religion, so it's particularly disturbing."

Prosecutors typically seek out an "expert review" and submit the material to a local court, but analysts say the reviews are slanted, courts are pliable, and higher courts rarely overturn their decisions.

Testifying on Kalistratov's behalf in early hearings, Mikhail Odintsov, an official working for Russia's rights ombudsman, slammed the expert analysis on which prosecutors based their case as "wholly unscientific."

"Reliance on such expertise is fraught with repeated miscarriages of justice and may prove a detonator of mass violations of human rights in Russia," he told the court.

AdChoices



A SMARTER WAY TO SHOP ONLINE

OVERWHELMING BLACK-FRIDAY-LIKE DEALS, EVERY DAY AT 1PM ET (EXCL. HOLIDAYS), EXCLUSIVELY FOR MASTERCARD® CARDHOLDERS.

GO NOW ▶

For complete terms and conditions [click here](#).

Top Stories

[Despite bloodshed, U.S. reports Afghanistan progress](#)

[WikiLeaks' Assange expected to be freed on bail](#)

[Tax package heads toward high stakes vote in House](#)

[Number of homes taken back by lenders tumbles](#)

[The Fast Fix: Everyone hates Congress. Does it matter?](#)

[Pakistani officials say US missiles kill 7 in NW](#)

[Blackwater heirs: America's new mercenaries](#)

[Obama plans 2011 staff makeover](#)

[Panel questions safety of lap children on planes](#)

[Fare of the Day: Los Angeles to Kansas City \\$178 RT](#)

[More Top Stories >](#)

Featured



Weekend Edition

Get the latest leisure, travel, fitness and health news.

» [Jim Brasher: Lost treasures of the city](#)



Foreign policy 'giant'

Passed U.S. diplomat Richard Holbrooke brokered Balkan peace.

» [More from Washington Post](#)



Health care and Obama

Is Obama's health care legislation in danger of being repealed?

» [More from The Fast Fix](#)



Video: Who Knew?

Just when you thought you knew the news.

» [More Who Knew? videos](#)

(Editing by Sonya Hepinstall)

Follow Yahoo! News on [Twitter](#), become a fan on [Facebook](#)

Buzz up! 0 votes | **Share** retweet **1** [Email](#) [Print](#)

Explore Related Content



Photo in Slideshow: [Russia's Prime Minister Vladimir Putin speaks during his annual address](#)



Photo in Slideshow: [Russia's Prime Minister Vladimir Putin chairs a meeting in Moscow](#)



Photo: [Moscow police arrest 700 to stave off riots](#)



[Play Video](#)

Video: [Russia unexpectedly postpones tycoon's verdict](#)

SHOP WITH THE CARD THAT GETS YOU **FREE STUFF FASTER**

SHOPPERS DRUG MART

[LEARN MORE](#)

Editor's Picks

[More Slideshows »](#)



[Anti-austerity protests sweep Europe](#)



[New York stores decorate holiday windows](#)



[Iconic images from 2010](#)



[Photo Highlight of the Day](#)

More...

Top Stories Video: [China vows friendship with India](#)
Reuters

Top Stories Video: [US official lands in North Korea](#) AP

Top Stories Video: [Beaten Cop Thanks 'Backup Lady'](#)
ABC News

1 Comment

Show: [Newest First](#)

[Post a Comment](#)

Pragya 22 minutes ago | [Report Abuse](#)

what the heck!!

0 0

[Reply](#)

Post a Comment

[Comment Guidelines](#)

4000 characters remaining

You will be seen as:



Jean-Philippe

[Change Photo](#) · [Change Name](#)

Also share this as an update to:

[Manage Updates](#)



[Add Facebook](#)

[Post Comment](#)

[Clear](#)

Most Viewed - Top Stories

[Pros and Cons of Sticking With One Job for Years](#) U.S. News & World Report

[Fireman admits causing farmer's death with siren](#) Reuters

[Russia unexpectedly postpones tycoon's verdict](#) AFP

[Special Report: Is America the sick man of the globe?](#) Reuters

[UAE hotel erects 11-million-dollar Christmas tree](#) AFP

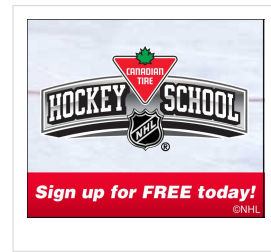
[All Most Viewed »](#)

Daily Features

[Opinions & Editorials: Diverse views on news from the right, left, and center.](#)

[All Comics »](#)

[All Opinion »](#)



Elsewhere on the Web

[The Christian Science Monitor: WikiLeaks' Julian Assange bail granted by British court](#)

[The Christian Science Monitor: Worlds apart: a firsthand look at emerging market growth](#)

[ABC News: Who's REALLY Flying Your Plane?](#)

[Home](#) | [U.S.](#) | [Business](#) | [World](#) | [Entertainment](#) | [Sports](#) | [Tech](#) | [Politics](#) | [Science](#) | [Health](#) | [Travel](#) | [Most Popular](#) | [Odd News](#) | [Opinion](#)

[Yahoo! News Network](#) | [RSS](#) | [News Alerts](#) | [Weather Alerts](#) | [Site Map](#) | [Help](#) | [Feedback](#)

Copyright © 2010 Reuters Limited. All rights reserved. Republication or redistribution of Reuters content is expressly prohibited without the prior written consent of Reuters. Reuters shall not be liable for any errors or delays in the content, or for any actions taken in reliance thereon.

Copyright © 2010 Yahoo! Inc. All rights reserved. [Questions or Comments](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [About Our Ads](#) | [Terms of Service](#) | [Copyright/IP Policy](#)