

## **Memorial recognizes Dennis Christensen, a Jehovah's Witness from Denmark, as a political prisoner**

A citizen of the Kingdom of Denmark, Dennis Ole Christensen, a Jehovah's Witness who lives in Orel, has been charged with committing an offence under Article 282.2, Section 1 (organizing the activity of a religious organization banned on grounds of extremist activity) of the Russian Criminal Code. According to the investigators working on the case, Christensen heads the religious organization of Jehovah's Witnesses in Orel.

FSB officers detained Christensen on 25 May 2017 in a building on Railway Street where Jehovah's Witnesses from Orel had gathered to read the Bible together. On 26 May Judge Svetlana Naumova, sitting in Soviet district court in Orel, ordered Christensen be remanded in custody.

The case against Christensen is one of the first in a campaign of persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia that sharply intensified after the Supreme Court, on 20 April 2017, ruled that the Administrative Centre of the Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia was an extremist organization. Moreover, Christensen has become the first Jehovah's Witness in the modern history of Russia to be deprived of liberty on grounds of religious affiliation.

The court ruling to remand Christensen in custody stated that he allegedly "committed acts of an organizational nature intended to enable the continuation of the illegal activities of the Orel Jehovah's Witnesses religious organization, including the holding of meetings of the Orel Jehovah's Witnesses' religious organization..., the organization of evangelistic work, and the distribution of the financial resources of the religious organization."

In our opinion, the charges brought against Christensen, based solely on the fact that he is a Jehovah's Witness, are discriminatory and in violation of international law, in particular the right to freedom of conscience. The ruling by Orel Region Court, designating the Orel Jehovah's Witnesses religious organization extremist and ordering its closure, as well as the decision of the Supreme Court, designating the national Jehovah's Witnesses' organization extremist and banning its activities in the country, have no basis in law and contradict Article 28 of the Constitution of the Russian Federation which guarantees freedom of conscience and religious belief.

We demand an immediate end to the prosecution of Dennis Christensen and other Jehovah's Witnesses, persecuted for their religious affiliation.

*Recognition of a person as a political prisoner, or of a prosecution as politically motivated, does not imply that Memorial Human Rights Centre shares or approves the individual's views, statements or actions.*

For more information about this case, see [here](#).

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