

JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES
OFFICE OF PUBLIC INFORMATION

For Immediate Release

June 1, 2004

Europe watches for Appeal Court's ruling on banning Jehovah's Witnesses in Moscow

MOSCOW—On June 16, 2004, the Moscow City (Appeal) Court will hear the appeal of a lower court's decision to ban the activity of Jehovah's Witnesses in the Russian capital. The ruling to ban was issued earlier this year on March 26 by Judge Vera K. Dubinskaya of the Golovinsky District Court of the city of Moscow. The Moscow City Court is expected to rule shortly after it hears arguments. If the Court upholds the ruling, the ban will immediately come into force, effectively outlawing the religious activity of 11,000 Muscovites and liquidating their legal entity.

Legal experts who are following the developments have commented that the case does not deal with claims of alleged wrongdoing, but it almost exclusively revolves around the teachings of a religious group, even though the European Convention on Human Rights affirms the right of freedom of religion. Observers conclude that the decision of the court will serve as a barometer of Russia's readiness to uphold its international commitments to religious freedom.

The trial, now in its sixth year, has not gone unnoticed by pan-European organizations. As reported in the Official Journal of the European Union, on November 28, 2002, European Union Commissioner of External Relations, Chris Patten, stated that "the Moscow office of the Jehovah's Witnesses is engaged in a four year long court case which could lead to its closure in Russia. . . . These restrictions cannot be easily reconciled with Russian commitments on human rights."

In a March 26, 2002, report, a Monitoring Committee of the [Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe](#) stated: "The co-rapporteurs regard the length of the judicial examination in this case [of Jehovah's Witnesses] as an example of harassment against a religious minority and believe that after six years of criminal and legal proceedings the trial should finally be halted." They were referring to four investigations between 1995 and 1998 as well as to the final ruling in 2001 ending a series of civil complaints, which failed to find any basis for banning Jehovah's Witnesses. The 2001 ruling was appealed by the prosecutor and resulted in the decision now under appeal by Jehovah's Witnesses.

The case is simultaneously being examined by the [European Court of Human Rights](#). In previous cases this Court has repeatedly declared Jehovah's Witnesses to be entitled to protection under the European Convention.

Local English-speaking contact: Christian Presber
Telephone: +7 (911) 944-4087 (within Russia 8 (911) 944-4087)

Local Russian-speaking contact Vasily Kalin
Telephone: +7 (916) 680-1779 (within Russia 8 (916) 680-1779)