

JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES
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Over 300,000 Russians sign petition to President Putin protesting Moscow ban on Jehovah's Witnesses

MOSCOW—More than 315,000 citizens across Russia have signed a petition addressed to President Vladimir Putin expressing their deep concern over the ban imposed on Jehovah's Witnesses in the Russian capital. The majority of those who signed are not Jehovah's Witnesses, but they are disturbed by the chilling precedent of a court outlawing a peaceful religious group.

On August 25, 2004, two representatives of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia will present the text of the petition and the entire 76 volumes containing the signatures to the designated department of the Presidential administration in the Kremlin. The petition is also addressed to the General Prosecutor of Russia, Vladimir Ustinov, and the Chairman of the Supreme Court, Vyacheslav Lebedyev, who will receive a copy of the text of the petition. The signatures were gathered in less than two months, between May 10 and June 27, 2004.

Prompting the petition was the Moscow Golovinsky Court ruling on March 26, 2004, liquidating the local registered Community of Jehovah's Witnesses and banning the activity of Jehovah's Witnesses. On June 16, 2004, the decision was upheld by the Moscow City (appeals) Court. Ordinary people and religious experts alike fear that the vague criteria used as a basis to ban Jehovah's Witnesses could be applied just as easily to any religion, including their own.

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