

JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES
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Deaf Russian citizens take fight for religious freedom to the European Court

STRASBOURG—This week the European Court of Human Rights will hear the case of *Kuznetsov and Others v Russian Federation*. At issue is the right of Christians, members of a registered faith community, to meet for worship in today's Russia. The hearing is scheduled for Thursday, September 9, at 9 a.m.

The court will be told that on April 16, 2000, a meeting of 150 deaf or partially deaf Jehovah's Witnesses in Chelyabinsk was illegally terminated by the then Human Rights Commissioner Yekaterina Victorovna Gorina with the help of police officers. Eyewitnesses described the emotional distress some of the deaf worshipers suffered when the Commissioner's group laughed at and mocked their disability. At the time, Professor O.O. Mironov, Federal Commissioner for Human Rights, strongly criticized "the extremely heavy-handed behaviour of the City authorities." Five of the alleged victims will attend the oral hearing in the European Court.

This case has taken on greater significance following the Moscow City (Appeal) Court's ruling on June 16, 2004, which upheld a lower court decision to ban the activity of Jehovah's Witnesses in Moscow and to liquidate their legal entity. That case, also under review by the European Court, raises issues of religious freedom similar to those in the case of *Kuznetsov and Others v Russian Federation*.

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