

JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES
OFFICE OF PUBLIC INFORMATION

For Immediate Release

October 20, 2004

Deaf Russians' case ruled admissible in European Court

Regarding a case brought by deaf Jehovah's Witnesses in the Russian town of Chelyabinsk, the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) unanimously "declared admissible, without prejudging the merits, the applicants' complaints about a disruption of their religious meeting and unfair hearing on their complaint."

The admissibility ruling granted on October 4 followed an oral hearing on September 9 in the European Court. In their decision as to admissibility, the Court examined: 1) Whether there was an interference of the religious meeting and 2) Whether the interference was justified. The seven judges concluded that "the complaint raises serious issues of fact and law under the Convention, the determination of which requires an examination of the merits."

The Court also ruled as admissible the applicants' complaint under Articles 6 and 13 of the Convention "about a number of procedural defects that flawed the examination of their complaint" by the Russian courts. Articles 6 and 13 guarantee a fair hearing and an effective remedy for violations of individual rights and freedoms.

The Court limited the complaint to those specific issues.

The Chelyabinsk sign-language congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses comprises a group with special needs. Ms. Gorina, a Commissioner for Human Rights, and the police raided and shut down the Christian meeting of that group of mainly deaf individuals, many of whom are elderly and also have impaired vision. Mindiyamal Khudaigulova, one of the deaf applicants, said: "Even to this day the older ones are always asking if Gorina will try to interfere with our worship again. Some are even terrified about the prospect."

The background to the case with a link to the decision as to the admissibility of Application No. 184/02, *Konstantin Kuznetsov and Others v Russian Federation*, may be found at www.jw-media.org.

English-speaking contact: Paul Gillies

Telephone: + 44 (0)7775 833880

French-speaking contact: Luca Toffoli

Telephone: +32 (0)475 58 10 36

Russian-speaking contact: Artur Leontyev

Telephone: +7 (911) 244 44 68