



THE EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION OF
JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES



GENERAL INCORPORATED ASSOCIATION
ASIA-PACIFIC ASSOCIATION OF
JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES



AFRICAN ASSOCIATION OF
JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES

31 January 2022

In behalf of
The European Association of Jehovah's Witnesses
Asia-Pacific Association of Jehovah's Witnesses
and
African Association of Jehovah's Witnesses
Joint Submission to the UN Human Rights Committee
Subsequent to the Adoption of the *List of Issues*
134th Session (28 February 2022 - 25 March 2022)

Russian Federation

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SUMMARY OF THE SUBMISSION

This submission to the Human Rights Committee (CCPR) addresses the Russian Federation's replies to the *List of Issues* in relation to its eighth periodic report insofar as they concern adherents of the religion of Jehovah's Witnesses. All arguments presented by the Russian Federation have been dismissed on numerous occasions by the most pre-eminent international tribunals, such as the European Court of Human Rights and the CCPR, and also by leading human rights bodies.

The actions of the Russian Federation have had serious repercussions on the lives of thousands of Russian Jehovah's Witnesses. The present document provides an overview of that ongoing persecution.

Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia, and as a worldwide organization, are deeply concerned by the Russian Federation's refusal to address the serious human rights violations perpetrated on peaceful believers. They respectfully request the government of Russia to take the necessary steps to:

1. End the current persecution in which Jehovah's Witnesses are subject to home raids, arrest, prosecution, financial restrictions, imprisonment and torture merely for the peaceful exercise of their religious beliefs.
2. Immediately release all of Jehovah's Witnesses currently in prison or under house arrest and expunge any criminal convictions for the exercise of their constitutional and Covenant rights.
3. Annul all previous sentences of individual Jehovah's Witnesses, acquit them on all charges and recognise their right to rehabilitation.
4. Restore the National Administrative Centre of Jehovah's Witnesses and local religious associations.
5. Restore the confiscated Administrative Centre and houses of worship properties.
6. Abide by its commitment to uphold the fundamental freedoms guaranteed by the Covenant for all citizens, including Jehovah's Witnesses.

ABOUT THE SUBMITTING ORGANIZATIONS



The European Association of Jehovah's Witnesses (EAJW) is a charity registered in the United Kingdom. It provides support to Jehovah's Witnesses facing fundamental human rights violations in various parts of the world. **Address:** 1 Kingdom Way, West Hanningfield, CHELMSFORD CM2 8FW, UNITED KINGDOM

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Registered Charity Number: 1085157



Asia-Pacific Association of Jehovah's Witnesses (APAJW) is a General Incorporated Association registered in Japan. It supports the activities of Jehovah's Witnesses and promotes the protection of fundamental freedoms in various part of the world, mainly in the Asia-Pacific region.

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Registered Corporate Number: 7010405019149



African Association of Jehovah's Witnesses (AAJW) is a public benefit organization registered in South Africa.

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. Jehovah's Witnesses have been present in Russia since 1891. They enjoyed a measure of freedom to worship when they received national registration on 11 December 1992. They were reregistered on 29 April 1999, in accordance with the Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations. However, after the Russian Federation amended the Federal Law on Counteracting Extremist Activity in 2006, Jehovah's Witnesses became a target of increasing government harassment.
2. On 20 April 2017, the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation ruled to liquidate all legal entities of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia, to terminate their activity and to confiscate their property. While this decision did not specifically prohibit the worship of Jehovah's Witnesses, the persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses drastically increased, with countless searches, arrests and prosecutions. In October 2021, the Plenum of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation announced that joint worship of Jehovah's Witnesses and their religious ceremonies do not constitute a crime under Article 282.2 of the Russian Criminal Code, despite the liquidation of the religion's legal entities. Nevertheless, since the Plenum issued that clarification, 23 Jehovah's Witnesses have been convicted by Russian courts. The following information establishes that Russia's declarations are in opposition to its actions toward Jehovah's Witnesses.

II. OBSERVATIONS ON THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION WRITTEN REPLIES TO THE *LIST OF ISSUES*

3. The Russian Federation's replies to the *List of Issues* in relation to its eighth periodic report (the Reply), paras. 105 to 112, purports to address the situation of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia and to refute or dismiss issues raised regarding this peaceful religious community in para. 18 of the *List of Issues*.
4. The Russian Federation's approach in the Reply is both misleading and disingenuous. It ignores not only the factual basis of the issues raised but also the clear and binding conclusions of the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) in, inter alia, the cases of *Jehovah's Witnesses of Moscow and Others v. Russia* (Application no. 302/02) and *Kuznetsov and Others v. Russia* (Application no. 184/02).
5. The Reply also disregards the opinion of the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (WGAD) in, inter alia, its Opinion No. 11/2019, concerning Dmitriy Mikhaylov (Russian Federation); Opinion No. 34/2019, concerning Vladimir Alushkin (Russian Federation); and Opinion No. 10/2020, concerning Aleksandr Solovyev and others (Russian Federation).
6. Paragraph 105 of the Reply refers to Presidential Decree No. 344 of 29 May 2020, to implement State policy on countering extremism and to give effect to the provisions of Federal Act No. 114-FZ of 25 July 2002 on Combating Extremist Activity.

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7. In its Opinion No. 660/2011 on the Federal Law on Combating Extremist Activity of the Russian Federation, the European Commission for Democracy Through Law (the Venice Commission) stated at para. 74:

[T]he Extremism Law, on account of its broad and imprecise wording, particularly insofar as the “basic notions” defined by the Law – such as the definition of “extremism”, “extremist actions”, “extremist organisations” or “extremist materials” – are concerned, gives too wide discretion in its interpretation and application, thus leading to arbitrariness.

8. In paras. 75 and 77, the Venice Commission continued:

The assurances of the authorities that the negative effects would be avoided thanks to the guidelines of the Supreme Court, the interpretation of the Russian Institute for Legislation and Comparative Law or good faith are not sufficient to satisfy the relevant international requirements. ... As such, the Extremism Law has the capacity of imposing disproportionate restrictions of fundamental rights and freedoms as enshrined in the European Convention on Human Rights (in particular Articles 6, 9, 10 and 11).

9. These substantive rights cited by the Venice Commission are essentially identical to those conferred by Articles 14, 18, 19, 21 and 22 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (the Covenant), which Russia ratified on 16 October 1973 and which entered into force on 23 March 1976.
10. The concerns expressed by the Venice Commission at para. 75 of its opinion are borne out in para. 107 of the Reply. The Russian Federation relies on the 20 April 2017 decision of the Supreme Court to dissolve the Administrative Centre of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia and the local religious entities affiliated with it by declaring it to be extremist. The Supreme Court of the Russian Federation has accordingly and signally failed to guard against negative and disproportionate restrictions on the fundamental right to religious freedom by peaceful adherents of the faith of Jehovah's Witnesses. The good faith promised by the Russian Federation is conspicuously absent in this decision.
11. Subsequent paragraphs of the Reply reiterate unsubstantiated allegations that were considered and robustly rejected by the ECHR in the case of *Jehovah's Witnesses of Moscow and Others v. Russia* (Application no. 302/02) (the *Moscow* decision) and hence should have been summarily dismissed as *res judicata* when repeated before the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation.
12. In paras. 108, 109, 110 and 111 of the Reply, vague and unspecific assertions are made about the impact of Jehovah's Witnesses on marriage, family life and minors.
13. In para. 111 of the *Moscow* decision, the ECHR stated:

It is a known fact that a religious way of life requires from its followers both abidance by religious rules and self-dedication to religious work that can take up a significant portion of the believer's time . . . , which is common to many Christian denominations . . . Nevertheless, as long as self-dedication to religious matters is the product of the believer's independent and free decision and however unhappy his or her family

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members may be about that decision, the ensuing estrangement cannot be taken to mean that the religion caused the break-up in the family. Quite often, the opposite is true: it is the resistance and unwillingness of non-religious family members to accept and to respect their religious relative's freedom to manifest and practise his or her religion that is the source of conflict. It is true that friction often exists in marriages where the spouses belong to different religious denominations or one of the spouses is a non-believer. However, this situation is common to all mixed-belief marriages and Jehovah's Witnesses are no exception.

14. Additionally, in paras. 124 and 125 of the *Moscow* decision, the ECHR stated:

[T]he involvement of children in the community's religious life appears to have been approved and encouraged by one of the parents who had been a Jehovah's Witness himself or herself. ... The Court reiterates that [the Convention] requires the State to respect the rights of parents to ensure education and teaching in conformity with their own religious convictions and that ... spouses enjoy equality of rights in their relations with their children.

This right is also explicitly conferred by Article 18.4 of the Covenant.

15. Paragraph 110 of the Reply referred to alleged "refusal of medical treatment (blood transfusion)" by Jehovah's Witnesses. However, paras. 136 and 144 of the *Moscow* decision the ECHR held:

The freedom to accept or refuse specific medical treatment, or to select an alternative form of treatment, is vital to the principles of self-determination and personal autonomy. A competent adult patient is free to decide, for instance, whether or not to undergo surgery or treatment or, by the same token, to have a blood transfusion. ... Furthermore, as the Court has found above, the refusal of blood transfusion was an expression of the free will of the individual community members who exercised their right to personal autonomy in the sphere of health care protected both under the Convention and in Russian law.

16. Accordingly, para. 110 of the Reply is a further expression of bad faith by the Russian Federation.

17. In para. 112, the Reply referred to

[A] collective complaint from the residents of the village of Fedoseevka (110 persons), requesting protection from aggressive proselytizing by members of a local religious organization, whose adherents regularly made visits to private homes, imposing their faith and distributing religious literature, including by leaving it in mailboxes, expressed negative opinions about the decisions of the authorities and insisted on acceptance of the Jehovah's Witnesses' religion as the one true faith.

18. Not only is this a misleading and tendentious characterization of the peaceful manifestation of religious faith practised by Jehovah's Witnesses but the ECHR stated in paras 122 and 139 of the *Moscow* decision:

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“[B]earing Christian witness . . . [is] an essential mission and a responsibility of every Christian and every Church”... The Court reiterates that, although the arguments based on religious beliefs may be extremely persuasive and compelling, the right “to try to convince one’s neighbour” is an essential element of religious freedom.

Of course, this “essential element of religious freedom” is also guaranteed by Articles 18 and 19 of the Covenant.

19. When reviewing the failure of the Russian Federation to implement the provisions of the *Moscow* decision, the 1,383rd meeting of the Committee of Ministers’ Deputies of the Council of Europe, 29 September – 1 October 2020, issued the following decision at paras. 4 and 5:

[The Deputies] reiterated their serious concern about the 2017 blanket ban and alarming reports from different sources including the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance and the European Association of Jehovah’s Witnesses that, as a consequence of this ban, Jehovah’s Witnesses continue to be arrested, prosecuted and imprisoned merely for peacefully manifesting their religious beliefs; [and] strongly regretted the persistent absence of the information repeatedly requested and called on the authorities to enter into a genuine dialogue with the Committee and to urgently take all necessary measures to re-establish the right of Jehovah’s Witnesses to freedom of religion, such as by reversing the 2017 ban, re-examining the related criminal cases and reviewing the current anti-extremism legislation.

20. In the accompanying notes (CM/Notes/1383/H46-17), the Committee of Ministers noted:

The new ban has created a legal ground for the repetition of similar violations, concerning not only the applications, but all other individuals and communities in their situation. It appears that this has now been confirmed by concrete examples in practice, as evidenced by various sources, including governmental ones.

21. In November 2020, and again in August and October 2021, authorities raided the homes of several Jehovah’s Witnesses in Moscow. Ivan Stepanovich Chaykovskiy, an applicant in the *Moscow* case, was detained and is currently being held under house arrest.

22. The report of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) on the Russian Federation, fifth monitoring cycle, published on 5 March 2019, to which the above decision of the Committee of Ministers refers, contains the following conclusions at paras. 101, 103 and 105:

ECRI expressed concern in its fourth report that the anti-extremism legislation was being used against certain minority religions, notably Jehovah’s Witnesses. Regrettably, the situation has deteriorated substantially since then. ... ECRI is alarmed at the association of Jehovah’s Witnesses with a terrorist organisation, which is seriously misleading and unreasonable and could lead to further acts of violence against this community ... ECRI strongly recommends that the Russian Federation authorities reconsider their position and take steps to reverse the ban on Jehovah’s Witnesses, as well as abandon all related measures involving their children.

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23. Therefore, the failure of the Russian Federation to properly engage with and respond to the issues raised in connection with the eighth periodic review reflects a pattern of evading its responsibilities under the international instruments to which it is a State party.
24. Furthermore, in the earlier ECHR decision *Kuznetsov and Others v. Russia* (Application no. 184/02), at para. 57, the Court established:

It is undeniable that the collective study and discussion of religious texts by the members of the religious group of Jehovah's Witnesses was a recognised form of manifestation of their religion in worship and teaching [attracting] the protection of Article 9 of the Convention.

25. It is reiterated that Article 18 of the Covenant confers the same protection on the peaceful manifestation of religious beliefs "in worship, observance, practice and teaching" as Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights. The arrest and prosecution of Jehovah's Witnesses for exercising this protected right is a further expression of contempt for its obligations under the Covenant by the Russian Federation.
26. Moreover, the WGAD asserted in its Opinion No. 10/2020, Aleksandr Solovyev and others (Russian Federation), paras. 80 and 81:

The Working Group notes that these 18 individuals are part of a now ever-growing number of Jehovah's Witnesses in the Russian Federation who have been arrested, detained and charged with criminal activity on the basis of mere exercise of freedom of religion, a right protected by article 18 of the Covenant. The Working Group therefore concludes that the arrest and detention of [the 18 named detainees] was discriminatory on the basis of religion and therefore falls under category V of the Working Group. The Working Group observes that while this is the third case to come before its regular communications procedure on the situation of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia, numerous other such cases have been raised through the joint urgent action procedure by the Working Group and other UN Special Procedures [...]. All these cases concerned the branding of the peaceful religious activities of Jehovah's Witnesses as "extremist activities", which has resulted in arrests and detentions of individuals belonging to this religious movement. Therefore, although the present opinion concerns the particular circumstances of the 18 named individuals, the Working Group emphasizes that its findings in this opinion apply to all others in similar situations.

27. In its earlier Opinion No. 11/2019 concerning Dmitriy Mikhaylov (Russian Federation), paras 74-77, the WGAD commented:

The Working Group specifically wishes to emphasize the latest joint letter of allegation, in which the special procedure mandate holders expressed concerns over "issue of systemic and institutionalized persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses". The Working Group is also mindful that on 14 May 2018, the universal periodic review of the Russian Federation was held. Among the recommendations addressed to the Russian Federation were recommendations to refrain from outlawing religious groups, including Jehovah's Witnesses, as "extremist" (A/HRC/39/13, paras. 147.199–147.204). 76. As stated earlier, the actions of Mr. Mikhaylov have always been entirely peaceful and there is no

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evidence that he or indeed the Jehovah's Witnesses in the Russian Federation have ever been violent or incited others to violence. The Working Group notes that Mr. Mikhaylov is only one of the now ever-growing number of Jehovah's Witnesses in the Russian Federation who have been arrested, detained and charged with criminal activity on the basis of mere exercise of freedom of religion, a right protected by article 18 of the Covenant ... All these cases concerned the branding of peaceful religious activities by Jehovah's Witnesses as "extremist activities", which has led to the arrest and detention of individuals having this religion. Although the present opinion concerns the particular circumstances of Mr. Mikhaylov, therefore, the Working Group wishes to emphasize that its findings in this opinion apply to all other individuals in situations similar to that of Mr. Mikhaylov.

28. Moreover, the WGAD in its Opinion No. 34/2019 concerning Vladimir Alushkin (Russian Federation) made similar findings and reiterated at para. 68:

[T]he Working Group wishes to emphasize that its findings in this opinion apply to all others in situations similar to that of Mr. Alushkin.

29. The Russian Federation has ignored these and related opinions of the WGAD, as Vladimir Alushkin was ultimately convicted on 13 December 2019.

30. The European Union made the following statement in July 2020 (OSCE Permanent Council No. 1276, Vienna, 23 July 2020, EU Statement on the situation of Jehovah's Witnesses in the Russian Federation):

We have heard the Russian delegation claim more than once at the Permanent Council that Jehovah's Witnesses are, and will continue to be, able to practice their religion freely, and that freedom of religion or belief is guaranteed in the Russian Federation. However, we continue to see numerous reports about home raids, detentions, and criminal investigations concerning Jehovah's Witnesses. This is in strong contrast with the claims by the Russian delegation. As we stated previously on numerous occasions, all people, including members of the Jehovah's Witnesses, must be able to peacefully enjoy their human rights, including the right to freedom of religion or belief, freedom of association and peaceful assembly and freedom of expression, without discrimination, as guaranteed by the Constitution of the Russian Federation, Russia's OSCE commitments and obligations under international law.

31. A joint communication was issued on 1 September 2020 under the mandates of the UN Human Rights Council Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, the WGAD, the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, the Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, the Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, the Special Rapporteur on minority issues, and the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism. It included the following comment:

[W]e wish to remind your Excellency's Government that concerns over the human rights situation of members of the religious minority of Jehovah's Witnesses and reports about

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acts of intimidation, violence and judicial harassment, as well as with regard to the liquidation of their Administrative Center and of all its local branches, have been raised through a number of communications (RUS 6/2015 of 11 November 2015; RUS 2/2017 of 23 March 2017; RUS 19/2018 of 14 September 2018; and, RUS 2/2020 of 5 June 2020). While we thank your Excellency's Government for its responses to these joint communications, we note with concern that violations perpetrated against members of this religious minority continue unabated, and that such violations have been intensified as a result of the designation of the Administrative Center of Jehovah's Witnesses as an "extremist organization" and the securitization and criminalization of the community's religious activities.

32. In its 2021 Annual Report, the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom recommended that Russia be designated a country of particular concern, inter alia, "for engaging in systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations of religious freedom" in its treatment of Jehovah's Witnesses.
33. It is evident that the Russian Federation has acted, and continues to act, with impunity in perpetrating intimidation, violence – including actual cases of torture by law enforcement officers – and judicial harassment against individual Jehovah's Witnesses, in disregard of its Covenant obligations.
34. As of January 2022, the Russian Federation has initiated 277 criminal cases, involving 597 believers, against individual Jehovah's Witnesses; 80 people are in prison for peacefully practising their religious beliefs and exercising rights protected by Articles 14, 18, 19, 21 and 22 of the Covenant. In addition, 30 more are under house arrest, and 1,678 private homes have been aggressively raided, with personal belongings searched and seized, contrary to Article 17 of the Covenant.
35. A particularly egregious example of action in defiance of the provisions of the Covenant and the opinions of the WGAD is the case of 70-year-old retired accountant and economist Valentina Baranovskaya, who suffers from progressive and life-threatening medical conditions, and her 47-year-old son, Roman Baranovskiy. On 10 April 2019, their home was aggressively raided by armed law enforcement officers. On 24 February 2021, the Abakan City Court of the Republic of Khakassia, Russian Federation, sentenced them to two years and six years in prison respectively, simply for the exercise of their Covenant-protected rights to freedom of religion and assembly. On 17 January 2022, the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation refused to release Valentina and Roman Baranovskiy or to reconsider their case.
36. As a further example, on 30 June 2021, Aleksey Berchuk (45) and Dmitriy Golik (34) were sentenced to eight years and 6.1 years in prison respectively by the Blagoveshchenskiy City Court of Amur Region for the peaceful practice of their religious faith.
37. The prosecution of Messrs. Berchuk and Golik began in 2017, with a violation of Article 17 of the Covenant by covert surveillance of homes and peaceful religious meetings for worship. During their trial, the prosecution's witness Nikolai Karendov, an FSB (state security service) operative, testified that at the services of Jehovah's Witnesses, he did not hear anything that violates the laws of the Russian Federation.

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38. Mr. Berchuk's eight-year sentence was the longest prison term imposed on one of Jehovah's Witnesses in the Russian Federation for the peaceful practice of religious faith since the Russian Federation Supreme Court decision in 2017. For comparison, under Article 111.1 of the Russian Federation Criminal Code, causing grievous bodily harm carries a maximum sentence of eight years; under Article 126.1, kidnapping carries a maximum of five years; and under Article 131.1, rape is punishable by three to six years in prison. Since Mr. Berchuk's conviction, three more Witnesses have been given eight-year prison sentences.
39. On 7 February 2019, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, issued a statement on criminalising the right to freedom of religion for Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia in which she said: "We urge the Government of Russia to revise the Federal Law on Combating Extremist Activity with a view to clarifying the vague and open-ended definition of 'extremist activity', and ensuring that the definition requires an element of violence or hatred. We also call on the authorities to drop charges against and to release all those detained for exercising their rights to freedom of religion or belief, the freedom of opinion and expression, and the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association."
40. Nevertheless, since the 14 August 2020 publication of the List of Issues in relation to the Eighth Periodic Report of the Russian Federation, at least 128 individual Jehovah's Witnesses have been arrested in connection with the peaceful exercise of their rights under Article 18 of the Covenant. More than 100 of these individuals either are in pretrial detention or are subject to restrictions involving deprivation of liberty, such as house arrest or recognisance agreements.
41. Paragraphs 105 to 112 of the Reply constitute the latest instalment in a lengthy succession of disingenuous responses to enquiries by international bodies regarding the treatment of adherents of the religion of Jehovah's Witnesses by the Russian Federation. While such responses invariably refer to the 2017 decision of the Supreme Court and subsequent decisions by lesser courts, any evidence of violence or incitement to violence by the peaceful adherents of that faith is conspicuous by its absence.
42. For example, the claims made by the Russian Federation in its published comments on the draft of the ECRI report cited above, that the decision of the Supreme Court "bans the activities of the religious organization of Jehovah's Witnesses [but] does not provide for interference with the right to freedom of religion and de facto does not allow such interference," are manifestly hollow and duplicitous.
43. Accordingly, it is undeniable that paras. 105 to 112 of the Reply, regarding Jehovah's Witnesses, are a disingenuous and egregious refusal by the Russian Federation to address the substantive issues raised by para. 18 of the *List of Issues*.

III. UPDATE ON VIOLATIONS OF THE PROVISIONS OF THE INTERNATIONAL COVENANT ON CIVIL AND POLITICAL RIGHTS

44. The Russian Federation has made the irrational claim that only the legal entities of Jehovah's Witnesses are banned but that individuals are free to practise their faith. For example, Andrei Fedorov, the head of the Office of the Russian Representative at the European Court of Human Rights, told the ECHR: "The authorities of the Russian Federation emphasize that the decision of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation dated April 20, 2017, and the appeal ruling of

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the Appellate Collegium of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation dated July 17, 2017, do not assess the doctrine of Jehovah's Witnesses, do not contain any restrictions or prohibitions on professing individually the above teaching”.

45. Additionally, on 20 June 2018, the Council Under the President of the Russian Federation for the Development of Civil Society and Human Rights stated: “This decision of the [Supreme] Court contains an exhaustive list of legal entities subject to liquidation. At the same time, the court’s decision does not contain any conclusions about the prohibition of the religion of Jehovah’s Witnesses as such.” However, in some cases, individual Witnesses were convicted in cities where Jehovah’s Witnesses did not even have a legal entity at the time of the Supreme Court’s decision.
46. These statements by representatives of the Russian Federation ignore reality. Jehovah’s Witnesses in Russia live in constant fear of their home being raided by police and of being charged with a serious crime just for practising their faith. To date, authorities have conducted 1,678 home raids and prosecuted nearly 600 individual Jehovah’s Witnesses. Eighty Jehovah’s Witnesses are currently in detention facilities, and there are 445 more who are still under investigation.
47. Dozens of individuals and their families suffer as a result of being included in the Rosfinmonitoring “List of Extremists”. This results in 1) bank accounts will be blocked, 2) insurance companies, non-State pension funds, currency exchange offices, pawnshops and any other financial organizations will refuse to allow the individual to perform financial transactions, 3) notaries will refuse to allow such a person to certify real estate transactions and issue powers of attorney, 4) an employer may refuse employment because there is no bank account for the transfer of wages. As a matter of fact, many have been fired from their job because they are Jehovah’s Witnesses, leaving whole families without any means of subsistence.
48. By way of example, the government of the Russian Federation has charged and prosecuted elderly Jehovah’s Witnesses. Yelena Savelyeva, an 80-year-old retired schoolteacher, was convicted on 17 November 2021 by the Severskiy City Court of the Tomsk Region. She was given a four-year suspended sentence. Yelena’s “crime” was simply peacefully sharing her faith with another person.
49. On 12 May 2021, the Industrial District Court in the city of Perm convicted 79-year-old Boris Burylov and gave him a 2.5-year suspended sentence. He is now 80 years old, and the Russian Federation has placed him on its list of “extremists”.
50. On 25 January 2022, 56-year-old Anna Safronova was sentenced to six years in prison. Mrs. Safronova is a peaceful widow who was the primary caretaker for her 81-year-old mother. This is the longest, harshest sentence handed down to a female Jehovah’s Witness. January 2022 has seen the highest number of Jehovah’s Witnesses in prison since 2017.
51. The Russian government has also tortured Jehovah’s Witnesses. In the early morning hours of 15 February 2019, authorities raided the homes of several Witnesses in Surgut, Russia. The authorities took some of the Witnesses to the Investigative Committee offices to interrogate them. When the Witnesses refused to disclose details about their co-religionists, the agents put

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bags over their heads and sealed the bags with tape. They tied the Witnesses' hands behind their backs and beat them. After stripping the Witnesses and dousing them with water, the agents shocked them with stun guns. This sadistic torture lasted for about two hours.

52. On 4 October 2021, armed Russian officers assaulted two couples in the city of Irkutsk. Officers grabbed Greta Razdobarov by her hair, dragged her, handcuffed her hands behind her back and repeatedly beat her. They handcuffed her husband, Anatoly, and kicked him in the abdomen. They wrenched him up off the ground and hyperextended his shoulders. Officers tortured him by trying to force a glass bottle into his buttocks.
53. Officers broke into the home of Nikolay and Liliya Merinov and hit Nikolay in the face with a blunt object, knocking him unconscious. When he woke up, an officer was sitting on top of him, punching him in the face and breaking his front teeth. Liliya was dragged out of bed by her hair and handcuffed.

IV. PENDING CASES BEFORE DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL JURISDICTIONS

54. Currently, there are 184 Jehovah's Witnesses subject to criminal trial in domestic courts. An additional 192 Witnesses are under pretrial investigation, and 21 more Witnesses have had their cases turned over to the prosecutor and are awaiting a decision on whether or not they will face a criminal trial.
55. Since 2010, Jehovah's Witnesses have filed 66 applications against the Russian Federation in the ECHR. They have also filed four applications on behalf of 39 applicants with the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention and 19 complaints with the UN Human Rights Committee.

V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

56. Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia, and as a worldwide organization, are deeply concerned by the Russian Federation's refusal to address the serious human rights violations perpetrated on peaceful believers. They respectfully request the government of Russia to take the necessary steps to:
 - (1) End the current persecution in which Jehovah's Witnesses are subject to home raids, arrest, prosecution, imprisonment and torture merely for the peaceful exercise of their religious beliefs.
 - (2) Immediately release all of Jehovah's Witnesses currently in prison and expunge any criminal convictions for the exercise of their constitutional and Covenant rights.
 - (3) Annul all previous sentences of individual Jehovah's Witnesses, acquit them on all charges and recognise their right to rehabilitation.
 - (4) Restore the National Administrative Centre of Jehovah's Witnesses and local religious associations.
 - (5) Restore the confiscated Administrative Centre and houses of worship properties.

- (6) Abide by its commitment to uphold the fundamental freedoms guaranteed by the Covenant for all citizens, including Jehovah's Witnesses.