

URGENT ACTION

DANISH JEHOVAH'S WITNESS REMAINS IN PRISON

Danish Jehovah's Witness Dennis Christensen continues to be imprisoned in Russia. His repeated requests to have his sentenced commuted have been rejected. His sentence expires in May 2022. During his imprisonment Dennis Christensen has been denied adequate medical care, and faced harassment and arbitrary reprimands. In March, the Kursk Regional Court found several reprimands unjustified. In June, Dennis Christensen was finally transferred to another penal colony for a planned medical examination. He is a prisoner of conscience, persecuted solely for exercising his freedom of religion and must be released immediately and unconditionally.

NO FURTHER ACTION IS REQUESTED. MANY THANKS TO ALL WHO SENT APPEALS.

Dennis Christensen, a Danish national who has been living in Russia for over 20 years, was arrested in May 2017, a month after the Russian Supreme Court declared Jehovah's Witnesses an "extremist" organization. He became the first Jehovah's Witness to be detained in Russia following the ban. On 6 February 2019, the Zheleznodorzhnyi District Court in Orel, a city in western Russia, found Dennis Christensen guilty of "organizing activities of an extremist organization" and sentenced him to six years in prison. According to the prosecution, his "crime" was organizing local worship and some of the evidence consisted in him collecting donations and organizing cleaning of the venue used by the worshipers. On 23 May 2019, the Orel Regional Court upheld the sentence and he was transported to a penal colony in Kursk region, some 200 km away from his home. There, the penal colony administration has subjected Dennis Christensen to constant harassment, including via unsubstantiated reprimands for purported violations of prison rules.

Dennis Christensen's numerous applications for parole or easing of the regime were unsuccessful. His fourth application reached the Lgov District Court which ruled, on 23 June 2020, to commute his sentence and release him subject to a RUB 400,000 (USD 5,304) fine. However, this decision was appealed by the prosecution and, on 4 September, quashed by the Kursk Regional Court, which sent the case back for reconsideration. Following this, Dennis Christensen was subjected to further harassment by the penal colony administration and spent 27 days in a punishment cell for purported disciplinary offences. In October 2020, the Lgov District Court rejected Dennis Christensen's application to commute the sentence. The court's decision argued that Dennis Christensen had refused to take up work in the penal colony, and ignored his lawyer's statement that his client's health condition had not allowed him to do work. This decision was upheld by the Regional Court in February 2021. The penal colony authorities continued to reprimand Dennis Christensen for alleged regime violations and also denied him access to adequate medical care. However, in March 2021, the Kursk Regional Court ruled several of those reprimands to be unjustified. In June 2021, Dennis Christensen was temporarily transferred for a planned medical examination to another penal colony.

Unless Dennis Christensen is released early, he will remain imprisoned until May 2022 (when his full sentence expires, on account of the time he spent in pretrial detention). The lawyer believes it is no longer necessary to send appeals at this point and thanked all those who have worked on this case for all the support and efforts to ensure his client's release. Amnesty International will continue monitoring case and calling for Denis Christensen's immediate and unconditional release, as he is a prisoner of conscience jailed solely for exercising his right to freedom of religion.

NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN: Dennis Christensen (he/his)

THIS IS THE FOURTH AND FINAL OUTPUT FOR UA 99/20

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LINK TO PREVIOUS UA: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur46/3041/2020/en/>