

URGENT ACTION

THREE JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES AT RISK OF TORTURE

On 15 February Russian law enforcement officials carried out raids on homes of Jehovah's Witnesses in the city of Surgut and arrested at least 40 people. There are credible allegations of torture and other ill-treatment in custody. Sergei Loginov, Artur Severinchik and Yevgeniy Fedin remain remanded in custody and are at serious risk of torture and other ill-treatment. They are prisoners of conscience, detained solely in connection with their religious beliefs, and must be released immediately and unconditionally.

TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

Chairman of the Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation
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Dear Chairman of the Investigative Committee,

I am writing to express my utmost concern following recent reports of torture and ill-treatment of Jehovah's Witnesses while in custody of law enforcement officials. At least 40 people, including minors, were arrested during raids of Jehovah's Witnesses' homes in Surgut on 15 February.

Amnesty International has examined evidence and carried out interviews with several persons who claim they were subjected to torture and other ill-treatment while in custody to extract "confessions" of participation in an "extremist organization". Some victims reported threats of rape.

*Jehovah's Witnesses **Sergei Loginov, Artur Severinchik and Yevgeniy Fedin** remain remanded in custody and are at serious risk of further torture and other ill-treatment. They are prisoners of conscience, detained solely for peacefully exercising their right to freedom of religion.*

I therefore urge you to:

***- Immediately and unconditionally release Sergei Loginov, Artur Severinchik and Yevgeniy Fedin; and
- Ensure that they are protected from torture and other ill-treatment, that allegations of torture and other ill-treatment against Sergei Loginov, Artur Severinchik and Yevgeniy Fedin, and other Jehovah's Witnesses, are promptly, effectively and impartially investigated, and all responsible brought to justice.***

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Jehovah's Witnesses have faced persecution and harassment in Russia since 2009, when a court in Rostov Region in southern Russia banned the local Jehovah's Witnesses' (JW) organization and declared 34 of JW's publications "extremist". In subsequent years, several Jehovah's Witnesses' groups across Russia were pronounced "extremist" by local courts. The relevant decisions relied on the vague definition of "extremism" in Russian law, and were consistent with the growing practice of its vague application which increasingly targeted political, but also religious and other forms of dissent. In April 2017, the Russian Supreme Court ruled that the central Jehovah's Witnesses organization in Russia should be closed, its activities stopped, and its property confiscated. This effectively banned all local groups. Since then, any activity on behalf of a local Jehovah's Witnesses group has been regarded as criminal.

In the morning of 15 February, law enforcement officials carried out searches of at least 20 homes of Jehovah's Witnesses in Surgut, Khanty-Mansiisk Autonomous Region-Yugra. After the house raids at least 40 people, including women and minors, were arrested and brought to the Investigation Committee in Surgut. There, FSB operatives and other security officials punched, kicked, suffocated and electrocuted with stun guns at least seven Jehovah's Witnesses to extract "confessions" of participation in an "extremist organization". Some victims reported threats of rape. According to victims and eyewitnesses, the screams of those subjected to ill-treatment were heard throughout the building. None of the officials and other visitors present (including, likely, state lawyers who had been called in to represent the victims) protested or tried to halt these activities.

One Jehovah Witness we interviewed stated that as his home was searched he was beaten and threatened with torture, intimidated during his interrogation and afterwards ill-treated. He also recounted procedural violations including denial of access to a lawyer of his choice.

The initial response of the Russian authorities to the above was a blank and unsubstantiated denial. However, on 22 February, the Investigation Committee announced that they would conduct a preliminary examination of the reports of torture. Amnesty International welcomes this decision and calls on the Russian authorities to follow it with a full, impartial and effective official investigation and bring those responsible to justice.

The Russian authorities must respect, protect, promote and fulfil the right to freedom of religion as enshrined in the country's Constitution and human rights treaties to which Russia is a state party.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: English and Russian.

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 11 April 2019

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN: **Sergei Loginov** (he/him), **Artur Severinchik** (he/him) and **Yevgeniy Fedin** (he/him).