

URGENT ACTION

STOP PROSECUTION OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES

The criminal proceedings against Jehovah's Witnesses Artur Severinchik, Yevgeniy Fedin and Sergei Loginov under "counter-extremism" legislation are ongoing. They are being persecuted for peacefully exercising their right to freedom of religion. Following the release of Yevgeniy Fedin and Sergei Loginov on 11 April from pre-trial detention the three are now under travel and other restrictions. Meanwhile, the authorities have failed to investigate effectively their and other Jehovah's Witnesses' allegations of torture and other ill-treatment.

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

Prosecutor General of the Russian Federation

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Electronic form in Russian:

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Twitter: @Genproc

Dear Prosecutor General,

I would like to express my concern regarding the ongoing criminal proceedings against Jehovah's Witnesses **Artur Severinchik**, **Sergei Loginov** and **Yevgeniy Fedin**. They are being persecuted solely for peacefully exercising their right to freedom of religion. While we welcome the release from pre-trial detention of Artur Severinchik on 15 March and Sergei Loginov and Yevgeniy Fedin on 11 April, all three are still under investigation under unfounded charges and subjected to a number of restrictions, including curfew and a prohibition to use phones or the internet.

Moreover, I am concerned that no effective investigation has been conducted into allegations of torture of several Jehovah's Witnesses following the raids of Jehovah's Witnesses' homes in Surgut on 15 February 2019. At least seven of around 40 people who were arrested during the raids complained of torture and other ill-treatment to which they were subjected by law enforcement officers while in their custody.

I therefore urge you to:

- **Terminate the criminal proceedings against Artur Severinchik, Sergei Loginov and Yevgeniy Fedin, and any Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia, under unfounded "counter-extremism" charges, and;**
- **Instigate prompt, effective and impartial investigations of the allegations of torture and other ill-treatment of Sergei Loginov, Artur Severinchik, Yevgeniy Fedin, and other Jehovah's Witnesses, and the prosecution in fair trial proceedings of anyone found responsible for these crimes.**

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 their "confessions" of participation in an "extremist organization". Some victims reported being threatened with 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-appointed lawyers who had been called in to represent the victims) protested or tried to halt these activities.

One Jehovah Witness interviewed by Amnesty International stated that as his home was being searched he was beaten and threatened with torture, and he gave further details of how he was intimidated and ill-treated during and after interrogation. He also recounted procedural violations that took place, including being denied access to a lawyer of his choice.

The initial response of the Russian authorities to the above was a blank and unsubstantiated denial. On 22 February, the Investigation Committee announced that it would conduct a preliminary examination of the reports of torture. However, to the best of Amnesty International's knowledge at the time of writing the preliminary has not been followed with an official investigation. In numerous other cases of torture and other ill-treatment documented by Amnesty International and other human rights groups in Russia, preliminary examination (pre-investigation) promptly concluded that there were no grounds for a full official investigation, including in cases where substantive and credible evidence of torture and other ill-treatment was produced by the victims or their lawyers.

On 26 February, the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) ordered the Russian government to immediately refer Sergei Loginov for medical examination. On 18 March, in its letter to the ECHR, the Russian Government stated that Sergei Loginov had been examined by health workers and that no diseases preventing his continued detention were found. The ECHR withdrew the urgent interim measures on 20 March, in spite of the fact that Sergei Loginov's examination was far short of the independent medical examination requested by his lawyer. His defence team continues to petition for effective investigation into his allegations of torture.

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: 14 June 2019

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

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

LINK TO PREVIOUS UA: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur46/0103/2019/en/>