

Ambassador Teimuraz Otarovich Ramishvili
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Your Excellency,

I am writing to express my concern about the increasing human rights violations against religious minorities in Russia. The July 2016 «anti-missionary» amendment to the Religion Law and its associated Administrative Code, as part of the Yarovaya law is expressed in such wide terms that also peaceful practice of religion may be penalised. Accordingly, the Russian authorities have taken actions against a number of religious minorities in Russia that have committed no crime but practicing their faith peacefully.

Russia has ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and is therefore obligated to ensure the right to freedom of religion, thought and conscience of everyone under its jurisdiction. This right includes the freedom to exercise the religion or belief of one's choice publicly or privately, alone or with others. The current wide-ranging legal provisions and its implementation violates this right to practice religion freely.

Your Excellency, more than 50 Jehovah's Witnesses are now facing criminal prosecution after their religious community was designated an «extremist organisation». According to Forum 18, 22 Jehovah's Witnesses are currently in detention while another three are under house arrest, and 27 are under travel restrictions.

Law enforcement agencies are also increasing the pressure on Protestants in Nizhny Novgorod region. They are using both the «anti-missionary» amendment and immigration law to punish churches and their members for activities such as inviting students to parties and posting videos of worship on social media.

Muslim readers of works by nonviolent theologian Said Nursi are also targeted through arrests and prosecutions. Six Muslim men are known to be currently in prison – or in custody with pending appeals – having been found guilty of involvement in meetings where they read Nursi's works.

I humbly petition your intervention in these cases to ensure that:

- all actions targeting religious minorities in Russia for peacefully practicing their faith are stopped immediately;
- the jailed believers will have fair trials and if their cases are unfounded, they will be acquitted and released immediately;
- the Religion Law and its associated Administrative Code is revised, and the scope of these laws limited so that it cannot be used against individuals or groups who peacefully practice their religion or faith.

I thank you in advance for using your influence as ambassador and conveying this message to the relevant authorities in your country.

Yours sincerely,