

Ambassador Mr. Vyacheslav Pavlovskiy  
Embassy of Russia to Norway  
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Your Excellency,

I am writing to express my concern about the lack of protection of the right to religious freedom among Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia. It has come to my attention that 70-year-old Valentina Baranovskaya and her son Roman Baranovskiy have been imprisoned since February 24, 2021, solely on the grounds of their religious confession.

On April 10, 2019, the homes of Ms. Baranovskaya and her son were raided by police. Personal belongings and religious items were confiscated. Investigator A.V. Pachuev opened a criminal case against the mother and son, accusing them of extremist activity, despite the fact that there are no victims in this case, and they have done nothing but peacefully practice their religion.

Your Excellency, Article 28 in Russia's Constitution grants its citizens the right to freedom of conscience and religion. Ms. Baranovskaya has been sentenced to two years in prison and her son, Mr. Baranovskiy to six years by Judge Elena Scherbakaova, who based her decision on Article 282.2 of the Russian Federation's Criminal Code. The Russian Supreme Court's categorization of Jehovah's Witnesses as extremists does not reflect the values expressed in the Constitution or Russia's commitment to Article 18 in the Declaration of Human Rights. Peaceful gatherings of believers practicing their faith, pose no threat to the government.

Ms. Baranovskaya is a retired, elderly woman with compromised health after suffering an ischemic stroke in the summer of 2020 due to stress from the court case. In May 2021, the Supreme Court of Khakassia still chose to uphold the verdict, and despite the woman's illness, the court has refused her an early release.

I would like to speak on behalf of all Jehovah's Witnesses who are imprisoned or on trial because of their beliefs. I am confident that Russia wishes to uphold its commitment to the protection of human rights and the right to religious freedom for all citizens. I therefore humbly petition your intervention to ensure that:

- all charges against Valentina Baranovskaya and Roman Baranovskiy are dropped, and they are released from prison immediately;
- imprisoned believers are granted fair trials and kept safe from torture. If their cases are unfounded, they should be acquitted and released immediately;
- Russia honors its commitment to protect and uphold the right to freedom of religion or belief for all, including minority faith communities such as Jehovah's Witnesses.

Sincerely,