

Brussels, May 19th, 2017

To His Excellency
Mr. Vladimir PUTIN
President of Russian Federation
The Kremlin
Moscow, Russia

The AIDLR's Declaration on Russia's Supreme Court 20 April 2017 decision to ban the Jehovah's Witnesses organization in Russia

Mr. Vladimir PUTIN, President of the Russian Federation

Dear Mr. President,

After the terrorist attacks perpetrated in many parts of the world, which have been strongly condemned by Your Excellency along with many others, we know that dangerous elements may be located within every society. Much attention, however, should be paid to the danger that the efforts to combat terrorism and extremism and preserve security don't degenerate into a pretext and a form of political abuse against peaceful people, religious groups and religious minorities; for example against peaceful Christians, Muslims and other religious communities.

The International Association for the Defense of Religious Liberty (AIDLR) had recently its 70th Anniversary (1946-2016) and from its beginning the goal of the AIDLR is to disseminate all over the world the principle of freedom of thinking, conscience, religion or belief and to protect in all legitimate ways, the right of every person to worship as he chooses or to practice no religion at all. The AIDLR doesn't represent any particular religion, church or political party, but advocates for understanding between people and nations, cultures and religions, for respect, human rights, peace and security, in favor of freedom of conscience, religion, belief, and advocates for freedom of expression and assembly of every person and religious communities.

In context of the AIDLR advocacy, the AIDLR is concerned over the decision of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation to ban the Jehovah's Witnesses and their activities by eliminating this community as a viable religious entity in the Russian Federation.

The AIDLR stresses that banning the Jehovahs Witnesses as a religious community for mere acts of worship, clearly violates the fundamental right to religious freedom, and with it, the international human rights standards. This represents a criminalization of their peaceful activities by declaring them and other religious communities as "extremist", and sets a pattern that may lead into discrimination and persecution over other religious communities too.

Consequently,

The AIDLR urges Your Excellency the President of the Russian Federation and the Russian authorities, to ensure that rights to freedom of religion and freedom of expression, freedom of peaceful assembly and association of individuals belonging to the Jehovah's Witnesses and to all other religious communities are upheld, in compliance with the obligations of the Russian Federation under international human rights law.

The AIDLR urges too that this ban on Jehovahs Witnesses be revised, respecting the international human rights law, principle of freedom of religion and freedom of conscience of every person without any kind of intolerance and discrimination.

Also the AIDLR is honored if Your Excellency should accept to be interviewed for the magazine Ambassadors for Liberty Hope and Peace that is annexed to this letter.

In anticipation of your understanding, I offer Your Excellency my gratitude.

Sincerely,

Dr. Liviu Olteanu
Secretary General