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## **United States Mission to the OSCE**

### **Concern about Respect for Freedom of Religion in Russia**

As delivered by Chargé d'Affaires, a.i. Kate M. Byrnes  
to the Permanent Council, Vienna  
July 20, 2017

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The United States has closely followed the legal case of the Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia. We are alarmed by the July 17 Supreme Court verdict to uphold the ban of Jehovah's Witnesses' activities and the dissolution of the Jehovah's Witnesses Administrative Center and its 395 local religious organizations for supposed "extremist activity."

It is abhorrent that the over 175,000 Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia may now face criminal prosecution for simply practicing their religion.

The increasing application of legislation concerning "extremism" to target wrongfully members of peaceful religious minority groups in Russia is troubling. We remind Russia to respect its OSCE commitments and other international obligations and commitments regarding freedom of religion, freedom of expression, freedom of association, and the right of peaceful assembly, and call on Russia to cease persecution of members of religious minorities.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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