

THE STATUS OF
RELIGIOUS LIBERTY
IN RUSSIA TODAY

HEARING
BEFORE THE
COMMISSION ON SECURITY AND
COOPERATION IN EUROPE

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THE STATUS OF RELIGIOUS LIBERTY IN RUSSIA TODAY

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 17, 2000

COMMISSION ON SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE,
WASHINGTON DC

The Commission met at 2:00 p.m., in Room B-318, Rayburn House Office Building, the Hon. Christopher H. Smith, presiding.

Commissioners present: the Hon. Christopher H. Smith, Chairman; the Hon. Steny H. Hoyer, Ranking Member.

Members present: the Hon. Bob Clement.

Witnesses present: Robert Seiple, Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom, U.S. Department of State; Rabbi Levi Shemtov, Director of the Washington Office, American Friends of Lubavitch, speaking for Rabbi Beryl Lazar of the Marina Roshcha Synagogue, Moscow, Russia; Father Leonid Kishkovsky, pastor of Our Lady of Kazan Russian Orthodox Church in Sea Cliff, New York, Ecumenical Officer for the Orthodox Church in America, and editor of the monthly newspaper, *The Orthodox Church*; Pastor Igor Nikitin, Chairman, Association of Christian Churches, St. Petersburg, Russia; Anatoly Krasikov, Chairman, Russian Chapter, International Association for Religious Liberty, Moscow, Russia.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH, CHAIRMAN

Mr. SMITH. The meeting will come to order.

Ladies and gentlemen, distinguished guests, members of the Commission, welcome to this hearing on the status of religious liberty in Russia today.

This is one in a series of hearings the Commission has held to examine human rights issues in the nations of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. The mandate of the Commission is to monitor and encourage compliance with the provisions of the Helsinki Accords and successive documents of the OSCE. We trust that these hearings, as well as other efforts of the Commission, contribute to that mandate.

Clearly, Russia is no longer the dictatorial, closed society that it was during the Soviet period, and there are certainly countries around the world where the freedom of religion is in much more perilous straits. For instance, the Helsinki Commission recently came into possession of a videotape showing the destruction—by cranes and bulldozers—of a Seventh Day Adventist Church building in Ashgabad, Turkmenistan.

The image of the worst of Ceausescu's Romania comes to mind when watching that film. We are all too familiar with other places on the globe where believers are harassed, brutalized, and even murdered for their faith.

But which way is Russia going? In 1997, a new Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations replaced an earlier, more liberal law. While the central government appears committed on paper to religious freedom through the country, some local officials have clearly interpreted the 1997 law as a license to harass minority religious groups.

At least one American missionary has been evicted from Russia, on what certainly appear to be very flimsy grounds. Charismatic groups have been accused by authorities of hypnotizing congregation members. Churches that formerly rented public buildings are now finding these premises closed to them by local officials.

The leadership of the Russian Orthodox Church, Moscow Patriarchy, seems more interested in criticizing so-called non-traditional faiths than in actually engaging in the witness of their faith—a right protected by a commitment to the freedom of speech. Even in supposedly more liberal Moscow, a court case against the Jehovah's Witnesses for allegedly inciting religious discord and destroying families has dragged on for more than 2 years.

Still, there has been some progress. Last November, the Russian Constitutional Court ruled parts of the 1997 law unconstitutional and eased registration restrictions imposed on religious organizations that had been registered before the 1997 law was adopted. Nevertheless, in the same decision the court reaffirmed the intrusive role of government into the affairs of religious organizations.

For instance, when a church wishes to register with the Ministry of Justice so it can enjoy full legal status, it has to present, among other pieces of information, information on its basic creed and related practices, including the history of how the religion arose and a history of the said association.

As last year closed, many religious organizations faced liquidation if they were not registered—under the provisions of the 1997 law—with the Ministry of Justice. However, the Ministry of Justice in Moscow sent a letter to local Ministry offices recommending an informal extension of the deadline until the Duma could reconsider the question.

While there have not been mass closings by local officials, there have been a few scattered reports of local officials ignoring the Ministry's recommendation. For instance, in the region of Chuvashia, the charismatic Church of Christ is under threat of closure.

In any event, the issue of religious liberty may hinge on wider considerations. In overall terms, Russia appears at the moment to be heading in a more nationalistic, anti-Western direction. To the chagrin and outrage of liberal political figures who supported the Unity party in December's Duma elections, Mr. Putin and his allies appear committed to an alliance with the Communists and anti-Western military figures.

If this is indeed the case, what does it portend for religious liberty, especially for minority and so-called non-traditional faiths in a nation where the state has been traditionally associated with one major denomination? Can the West play a role in assuring that Russia lives

up to its international commitments on religious freedom? Or is Russia indifferent to Western voices, as it appears to be with regard to the bloody war in Chechnya?

Our panels today are uniquely qualified to provide their insights on these questions.

Our first witness is Ambassador Robert Seiple, United States Ambassador At-Large for International Religious Freedom. As part of the legislative mandate of the International Religious Freedom Act, Ambassador Seiple is actively engaged in promoting religious freedom throughout the world for our government. It is indeed a pleasure to welcome him before this Commission today.

I would like to yield to my good friend, Mr. Clement, if he has any opening comments.

OPENING STATEMENT OF THE HON. BOB CLEMENT

Mr. CLEMENT. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for your hard work on human rights and religious freedom.

And thank you, Ambassador Seiple, for your hard work. I am pleased you are implementing the law we worked so hard on. As you know, I am one of the coauthors of the International Religious Freedom Act, and a number of us, as well as so many organizations that are represented here today, are responsible for this law being on the books.

I may take somewhat of a different approach than the Chairman is taking today, but I know his intentions are good when it comes to human rights and religious freedom. I have been to Russia, and I have the highest respect and regard for the Russian people.

It was one of the most interesting visits I have ever had, and I had the opportunity to meet with many of the officials in Russia. I know what a difficult time Russia is having at the present time economically in moving toward a market-oriented society, and trying to change their laws, and the difficulties in changing those laws.

And I know how difficult it is here in the United States. What do they say about it sort of looks like sausage. It's awfully ugly, but it is necessary. Sometimes we move at a snail's pace.

I will never forget when the Soviet Union was in power before everything has happened since that time. I had one of the Russian diplomats in Nashville, Tennessee, and I represent Nashville, Tennessee, Country Music U.S.A.

There are two places I took this Russian diplomat from the Soviet Union, and one was a place that Congressman Steny Hoyer likes very much and works with those people, and that was the Grand Old Opry. This Russian diplomat thought that he was in outer space when I took him to the Grand Old Opry.

Number two, I took him to church in Nashville, and I will never forget that experience because he had already told me that he was a hard-line Communist. He had already told me that he did not believe in God.

But right in the middle of the church service—I will never forget—he leaned over to me and said, “Bob, this is very contagious.” And I never forgot him using that word “contagious.” That is one of the reasons why I worked so hard on the International Religious Freedom Act. I have a fine staffer here today, Laura Bryant, who worked with me on that.

I am pleased that is on the books, because we are not trying to dictate Christianity across the world, but we want respect for all religions and all faiths. Under the leadership of Ambassador Seiple and his fine staff, we are setting a high standard—an example that the United Nations and so many other organizations believe in when it comes to some international principles.

So like the rest of you, I spent a lot of time working against passage of that 1997 law in Russia. I was one of many who appealed to President Yeltsin, and also worked with Vice President Gore prior to his visit to Moscow, where he raised the problem.

As we all know, the law did pass, and I am glad it has not yet served to restrict religious freedom in some of the ways we feared. However, I am quite concerned about the number of incidents that may be related to this law, including many registration problems.

I am also concerned about such cases as the judge who was recently removed from her position because she is a member of a Pentecostal church, and the misuse of laws that resulted in an American Baptist missionary's expulsion from Russia. It is my hope that Russia's new leadership will take a strong stand for religious freedom.

I do want to thank the State Department and the Helsinki Commission for the vigilance they've shown. That vigilance has made a critical difference in holding off some of the worst effects of the law.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. SMITH. Mr. Clement, thank you very much for your statement.

I would like to yield to the ranking member of the Commission, Mr. Hoyer.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. STENY H. HOYER, RANKING MEMBER

Mr. HOYER. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I apologize for being late. We had an appropriations hearing contemporaneously with this one. Mr. Ambassador, hopefully you're going to get a chance to testify. But let me make a few comments, if I can.

(Laughter.)

First of all, let me thank Mr. Clement and the Chairman of this Commission, Mr. Smith, as well as others—Mr. Wolf, and Mr. Hall, and many others in the Congress—who have fought so vigorously to keep the Congress, the American public, and the Helsinki community focused on religious liberty as a central focus for freedom, as a central flag of whether freedom exists or not.

And I want to thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this hearing.

The status of religious liberty in Russia today is, I think, unclear. Certainly, there are nations in the world where people of faith are in greater danger. Thankfully, we are past, I think, the stage in Russia where citizens for the most part are jailed for their beliefs or need to fear for their lives.

But there is no doubt in my mind that the liberties achieved by the Russian people over the past 10 years are still very fragile. There are still many people in positions of power in Russia who would like to return to the past, or move to a more repressive, restrictive future.

Frankly, I think it is yet to be determined where the current President comes down on that.

Under the current legal system in Russia, the central government adopts national laws. Frequently, however, as we know, bureaucrats in faraway regions tend to have the authority or—the apparent or at least real authority whether or not they want to obey the law, or at least how they will interpret the law. I think this has been the case in many regions with respect to religious liberty.

In some instances, religious communities have been able to secure their legal rights through court decisions—in and of itself, a significant step forward for Russia.

But even in light of court decisions, they then face attempts by local officials to liquidate their formal status on flimsy legal grounds. In many cases, local officials claim to be protecting citizens from the alleged dangers of sects.

I might say this is not limited to Russia alone. The Chairman and I have been to Vienna and have discussed this with Austrian authorities, as well as other EU nations as they deal with so-called sects.

It seems to me that their time might be better spent working on economic and social betterment for all of their constituents, rather than worrying about sects. That is not to say that there is not, obviously, a legitimate concern, in Europe in particular, about fringe groups spreading hate. But that should not be used as an excuse to limit religious freedom.

Mr. Chairman, the Russia we see today, as you know, is turning a more somber face to the West and to the international community. Exploiting the legitimate rationale of fighting terrorism, Moscow is carrying out a murderous war in many respects against Chechnya and thousands of innocent civilians.

If a country whose president recently vowed, and I quote, “to revive the moral fiber of the Russian people”—certainly a worthy objective—can so blithely ignore international standards, such as the Geneva Conventions, some of which do apply to internal conflicts, and the OSCE Code of Conduct, if that country can arrest one of its citizens and then hand him back over to the very terrorists they claim to be combating—and I refer to the journalist, of course—one wonders how much protection will be accorded to the entire spectrum of human rights in the future, including, of course, religious liberty.

Mr. Chairman, I welcome our distinguished panel of witnesses and look forward to hearing their views on the current status and future prospects for religious liberty in Russia.

I would like to note that when I accompanied President Clinton to his Summit meeting with President Yeltsin in September of 1998, members of our delegation had the opportunity to meet with Rabbi Lazar and tour the Marina Roscha Synagogue, as well as attend the dedication of the Holocaust Memorial in Victory Park. Those, obviously, were significant signs of progress.

But it is clear that in every country, even in our own, there is a tendency to divide citizens based on arbitrary distinctions, one of which is—and can be most virulent—and that is religious and ethnic differences.

We have seen that most recently in Kosovo. We saw it in Bosnia. We see it in far too many places in the world. We see in Afghanistan horrific actions against women based upon so-called religious tenets.

So I think this hearing is critical and absolutely essential to this country—the beacon of freedom for all the world.

Those of us who have had the privilege of traveling extensively know that whatever criticisms individuals around the world might make of America, at bottom they may not like it but they view America as the principal proponent of freedom and the principal defender of liberty around the world.

And that does not—and the most powerful weapon in our arsenal is not our bombs and planes. It is our principles and ideas. And we must vigorously pursue the strength of the Helsinki process, which has been the bringing to light of the failure of nations and governments to meet their commitments and the principles to which they have signed onto.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. SMITH. Thank you very much, Mr. Hoyer.

Let me now introduce our very distinguished witness, Bob Seiple, who came to the State Department in August of 1998 as Principal Advisor to the President and Special Representative to the Secretary of State for International Religious Freedom.

In May of 1999, he was named the first U.S. Ambassador At-Large for International Religious Freedom. He has spent—or spent the previous 11 years as President of World Vision and also founded the Institute for Global Engagement—a strategic think-tank within the Organization for Global Advocacy.

Ambassador Seiple holds his degree in American Literature from Brown University and served as a Captain in the U.S. Marine Corps.

Ambassador, welcome, and we look forward to your testimony.

**TESTIMONY OF ROBERT SEIPLE,
AMBASSADOR-AT-LARGE FOR
INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM,
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE**

Amb. SEIPLE. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and Helsinki Commissioners. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you this afternoon to testify on the status of religious freedom in Russia. The Helsinki Commission is to be commended for holding a hearing on this very important subject.

Before turning to my remarks, we'd like to ask that the Russian section from the first report that we did last September—International Religious Freedom—be inserted into the record of this—

Mr. SMITH. Without objection, it will be made a part of the record.

Amb. SEIPLE. Thank you.

At the outset, I wanted to make clear our view that international standards of religious freedom are generally respected in Russia. But as I will explain, in Russia there is the potential for events to bring about a decline of religious freedom. I have also explained how there is also the potential for us and like-minded advocates of religious freedom to take steps to prevent this from happening. This is why our engagement and the engagement of this Commission are so important.

A number of significant events have transpired since the September 1999 release of our report. First, the Constitutional Court has ruled on the challenge to the '97 restrictive religion law. Second, the Duma failed to enact legislation which would extend the deadline for re-registration of religious groups and organizations.

We have had some important successes in addressing issues at the local level, but there have been more instances of some local officials using the '97 law to harass so-called non-traditional religious groups.

These events have taken place against a backdrop of dramatic social and political change. Russia has experienced the threat of terrorist bombings, has launched a brutal military assault in Chechnya. Russians elected a new Duma in December, and the campaign to succeed Russia's first democratically-elected president is well underway.

Many of Russia's politicians sounded patriotic, even nationalistic, themes in election campaigns. Yet even under these circumstances, there have been voices willing to listen to reason, brave Russians willing to take risks for their faith, and local officials willing to act responsibly.

Even diplomacy has had its day in effectively promoting religious freedom, as we will describe.

In my testimony, I will review the significant events since the publication of the September report on religious freedom, focus on a couple of the unresolved issues in our bilateral agenda, and highlight some of the challenges for the future.

First, let me turn to the November 23 ruling of the Constitutional Court. You'll recall that the '97 law entitled Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations severely limits the rights of religious organizations which cannot document their existence over the previous 15 years, otherwise known as the 15-year rule.

The court has now ruled that the law does not prohibit most religious groups and organizations from re-registering; in particular, those which had been registered before passage of the '97 law.

This ruling was important because the 15-year provision was used to restrict many so-called non-traditional religions, such as the Jehovah's Witnesses. I point out that the Jehovah's Witnesses have been in Russia for at least 100 years, during which time, unfortunately, Joseph Stalin sent many of them to labor camps or exile in Siberia.

This permitted Jehovah's Witnesses and most other religions in Russia, already registered before the passage of the '97 law, to re-register in a community without proving they were in existence in that community 15 years ago. This ruling was held by most as a step in the right direction, even though it left the 15-year requirement in place.

We note also that the Constitutional Court ruling does not challenge other restrictive parts of the '97 law, including those which may limit the activity of religious groups in the interest of national security, or which may allow the government to interfere in religion far more than is proper in a free society. We are watching carefully to see if these restrictive provisions are exercised.

The 1997 law required that all religious organizations re-register both federally and locally by December 31, 1999. As the deadline approached, it was apparent that thousands of religious organizations—including many Russian Orthodox parishes—had not successfully re-registered, owing in no small part to the small number of civil servants employed to handle the paperwork.

Despite impending elections, it was rumored that the Duma would pass legislation extending the deadline before it recessed in December. That failed to happen, and it was left to the Ministry of Justice to issue a recommendation for a waiver of the registration deadline until the Duma can address the issue legislatively.

This Ministry of Justice recommendation, however, does not have the force of law and leaves unregistered organizations vulnerable to the whims of local officials. As others have noted, the unsettled situation with respect to the law on religion undermines the rule of law.

Threats to human rights and religious freedom remain high because of the conflict in the North Caucasus. Muslim religious leaders have complained that their clergy have not been permitted to minister to Muslim military service members. The U.S. Embassy has noted a slowness to re-register Muslim organizations in the North Caucasus.

Federal and Dagestani authorities have stepped up pressure on the republic's Wahhabi Muslim community. After an incursion on August 7 by Chechen-backed Islamist guerrillas, Dagestan President Magomedali Magomedov declared that his government would take a harder line against Wahhabism.

This is a very complex issue. It is a fact that some fundamentalist Islamic organizations, which have their origins outside of Russia, support insurgent militant groups in Russia. As the Russian government acts to carry out its responsibility to combat terrorism and insurgency on its soil, some religious groups have been subject to legitimate law enforcement action.

But we have also seen reports that government and religious officials in several Dagestani districts have wrecked conservative Islamic mosques, suppressed religions, religious broadcasts, and harassed local conservative Islamic communities. According to press reports, federal and Dagestani forces have followed up their initial counterinsurgency efforts with attacks on Muslim villages that refuse to register their communities and turn in their weapons.

Elsewhere in the country, as foreign or so-called non-traditional religions in the country continue to recruit new members, some Russians have developed resentment toward these foreign sects. This hostility is perhaps influenced by negative reports in the mass media and public criticism by Russian Orthodox Church officials and other influential figures.

But it is also true that many resent well-financed foreign missionaries. These sentiments appear to have initiated occasional harassment and even physical attacks.

For example, according to press reports, in August, between 10 and 15 youths burst into a Moscow Hare Krishna temple, beat followers, and gave at least one person a head laceration severe enough to require hospitalization. Extremist politicians and opinion leaders seek to exploit this resentment.

Illustrative of the type of message that the public hears from time to time is the example of Aleksander Khokhlov, editor of the "Outlaw" television program, who accused the Civil Commission for Human Rights—a Scientologist organization—of being sponsored by the CIA. There have been numerous other instances of local harassment of Pentecostals in the Far East and Jews in St. Petersburg.

Yet not all reports from NGOs and our posts in Moscow, St. Petersburg, Vladivostok, and Ekaterinberg are without hope. We have seen some positive steps taken against anti-Semitism.

For example, in August, the Ministry of Press, Television, Radio Broadcasting, and Mass Communications issued a warning to a city-owned television station in St. Petersburg for airing anti-Semitic material, in violation of the mass media law's prohibition on inciting racial violence or hatred.

In August, St. Petersburg Commissioner for Human Rights, Mikhail Chulaki, publicly criticized the program that broadcast the anti-Semitic material.

Diplomacy has also had some effect in promoting religious freedom. In Samara Oblast, a region thought progressive in the past on these matters, Russian Orthodox Christians, Roman Catholics, and members of the Church of Latter Day Saints had difficulties in the fall which were associated with the registration process required by the 1997 law.

Representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church were able to resolve the difficulties working with Oblast authorities and Governor Titov, who has a reputation as a progressive. Unfortunately, neither the Roman Catholics nor the Mormons were initially able to make any headway working with the local officials.

So when Governor Titov visited the United States this fall, we met with him to raise these issues. We understand that members of Congress also met with him as well. At the time, it seemed that Governor Titov was very receptive, and we were pleased that shortly after his return both groups reported being able to work with local officials to clear up the difficulties.

The Russians themselves have engaged in diplomacy to promote religious freedom. Before President Yeltsin stepped down, he told visiting Israeli Prime Minister Yehud Barak that the Russian government would prosecute anti-Semitic crimes. Yeltsin proposed Israeli-Russian cooperation on combating anti-Semitism. Actions, of course, will speak louder than words.

This is not to say that religious minorities are completely free everywhere to practice their faiths without harassment. Unfortunately, the case of Reverend Dan Pollard in Khabarovsk Krai is a good example of obstinate local officials over which Moscow seems to have little control. Regrettably, we have been working hard on this case without success.

We continue to receive reports, all of which we investigate and many of which we will include in the soon-to-be-released 1999 country reports on human rights practices later this month, and in our September annual report to Congress on international religious freedom. These reports will be available to the public on our State Department website at www.state.gov.

Despite these incidents, many observers today believe that the situation with respect to religious freedom in Russia has stabilized. I believe the country remains on the cusp. While many Jews and Christian groups believe that the situation for them has not worsened—and, in many instances, has improved—Muslims, especially in the North Caucasus, are under threat because of the situation there.

We have heard that President Putin is a devout Russian Orthodox Christian. It is worth recalling how much of a contrast this presents with respect to Russian leaders only a decade ago. It has been less than 10 short years since the Soviet Union—an avowedly atheistic, Communist country—threatened the West with its Cold War ideology and nuclear weapons.

Russia now seeks respect for itself on the basis of cooperation in trade and security matters, while searching for its own course in political and civil society development. While Russia's leaders often encourage the perception of Russia's identity as closely associated with

one church—the Russian Orthodox Church—they also acknowledge a role for the other traditions which have been a part of Russia’s history.

Given the important role of the Orthodox Church in the nation’s history, the identification of Russia with Orthodoxy is understandable, but supporters of the church present a challenge for religious freedom, democracy, and human rights by seeking to enforce locally restrictive legislation.

We have argued in the introduction to our first annual country report on international religious freedom that religious freedom is a fundamental human right which supports the dignity of human beings and upon which other rights are based. In this sense, religious freedom is a bellwether for the health of society.

In Russia today, we see a country on the cusp, poised to plunge into a new millennium either as a political partner with the West, where the rights of all its citizens are respected and protected, or as a state that does not respect the right of all its citizens to worship God as they choose. Religious freedom will not be safe in Russia while restrictions of the ’97 religious freedom law remain, while officials at all levels have the possibility of invoking the law to suit their own purposes.

I am an optimist by nature. I believe the Russian people and their government will choose to respect religious freedom and democracy, but not without the active support of the international community. We will continue to work with our European partners to promote a climate in Russia which respects diversity in religious practice.

We will continue to work with the NGOs and individuals who report on religious freedom issues, recognizing those brave souls who swallow fear and stand up to authority to assert their human dignity and rights. We must continue to recognize those government and church officials who speak out in favor of promoting religious freedom.

Finally, to realize this optimistic future, we must continue to work with this Commission, for in our very public commitment, such as in this hearing today, we remind the Russians of their international commitments to religious freedom. We will need to continue to use every opportunity to confront the government of Russia when we find failings of their resolve. These are the challenges for the future.

Mr. Chairman, thank you very much.

Mr. SMITH. Mr. Ambassador, thank you very much for your excellent testimony. I would like to ask you a couple of questions, and then I will yield to my colleagues.

You spoke a number of times about the Russians or Russia being on the cusp, and that they could perhaps go either way. Larry Uzzell, who is the Director of the Keston Institute and has appeared both at briefings and before our Commission in past times, is considered, as you know, to be a very wise expert on these issues.

He has suggested that for the next six months the Russian Duma, the political powers that be, will be preoccupied with the elections and then a post-election consolidation. But then, in his view, he thinks the current crackdown on freedom of the press may lead to other restrictions and that religious freedom, to quote him, “is not likely to thrive in that era.”

I wonder if you can tell us what your sense is as to the makeup of the Duma right now. Are they more predisposed toward expanding,

maintaining the same, or repressing religious freedom? What do you think we could be doing right now preemptively?

Perhaps this hearing could be seen as part of that, and your good work—to try to put the Russians on notice that these are not U.S. norms, these are internationally recognized norms, and there's a high expectation that they will live up to them. What should we do preemptively?

Amb. SEIPLE. Well, let me first say, Larry is always a friend, and I have the same respect that you have. I think he's absolutely right. In the next six months, given the preoccupation with the upcoming elections, what is going on in Chechnya, we are probably not going to see much change.

After that, I think it is very difficult to call. We do not know. The Duma elected on the 19th of December, yet to be seated, yet to act. What will they do with the extension of deadlines, and so on? What will they do with individual cases that are brought their way? Will there be any liberalization, any more liberalization, of the '97 law?

In anticipation of his warning and us not really knowing what the future brings, I think we have to continue to do exactly what we have been doing. We have to be having hearings like this. We have to have periodic updates. When something is wrong, out of favor, or something that goes against either the international covenants or our own sense of human rights, or both, we need to shout early, often, loud.

We need to be vigilant. We need to be diligent. We need to be transparent about America's interest in this issue, and the role of the American people, the role of this Congress, the role of this government, in putting our shoulder—our considerable shoulder to the international wheel of religious freedom.

And so I would not let a gap appear in something that goes awry in our ability to stand up and speak out against it forcefully.

Mr. SMITH. As you know, Senator Gordon Smith's amendment was worded in such a way that was hoping to act as a prod to the Russians to move in the area of reform rather than regression. Would that kind of legislation be helpful?

Yesterday I asked Secretary Madeleine Albright at an International Relations Committee hearing if, in relation to the atrocities that are being committed every day in Chechnya, if the administration would consider some of the recommendations that people like Max Kampelmann, who is well-known to this Commission and very well respected, Zbigniew Brzezinski, and others have put forward, saying that—hold up or do—use whatever leverage we have to hold up World Bank, IMF loans, disinvite, or certainly do not invite the Russians to the next Summit, if indeed they are careening down the wrong path.

That was with relation to Chechnya, which is an ultimate human rights abuse, a terrible, war, and war of aggression, I would note. But here we are talking about, you know, on another human rights potential abuse that could go from bad to worse if we are not careful.

Would those kinds of things be helpful? I mean, is Smith's amendment a step in the right direction, providing it has the flexibility for the President, like a national interest waiver or something like that?

Amb. SEIPLE. First, let me say that we welcome Senator Smith's passion on this issue. He has been very forceful in speaking out, and, again, these are issues that the more folks that do stand up and speak out the better off we are. He has also had the effect of focusing this issue with what is now called "the Smith amendment."

I think the combination of the Smith Amendment and the International Religious Freedom Act obligates us, even if we weren't impassioned and called in this direction, obligates us to raise these issues early and often, as I said before, and gives us some clout.

Most countries do not have the clout that we have, either in the sanctions that are a part of the IRFA Act or the clout that comes out of the Smith amendment. So we can say things with more force than many of our allies, many of our colleagues.

The short answer to your question—these things are helpful. The most important help, however, comes from individual citizens, leaders like you, who will stand up at the drop of a hat and make sure that the government, whatever government, the new government of Russia, understands that these are important considerations in our bilateral relationships. When they arise, our bilateral relationships will suffer until they are fixed.

Mr. SMITH. Mr. Hoyer?

Mr. HOYER. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I think the Ambassador's statement was very complete. Let me just ask a couple of questions.

As noted in the State Department's report on international religious freedom on September 9, 1999, 30 of the 89 regional governments in Russia have passed restrictive laws and decrees intended to restrict activities of religious groups. Both you and I in our statements discussed the disconnection between federal and state laws, or at least state practices. That is obviously something which is not necessarily foreign to the United States itself from time to time.

We are aware of one law that was declared unconstitutional by a regional Supreme Court. My question: have any of these laws been declared unconstitutional by regional Supreme Courts, to your knowledge?

Amb. SEIPLE. Well, first of all, we haven't seen any growth in that number, which is to say we do not see a trend in the number of individual districts, provinces, creating their own laws. We do have a couple of examples where there have been local laws overturned.

In Ocaria and Yuroslav, two examples of this—one involving a Lutheran Evangelical and one, I think, involving the Jehovah's Witnesses. Again, this is an issue that we felt could happen with the legislation, the uneven implementation, and the ability to do more restrictive creation of laws out in the provinces.

But, to date, we have been able to see a couple of them overturned, and we haven't seen a proliferation in them.

Mr. HOYER. Okay. I perhaps should know this, and I perhaps should have turned to staff so I do not embarrass myself. But I am going to go ahead and ask the question. You mentioned a case in here but did not explain the case. I am trying to think of what it was—an individual that you mentioned in here, in your statement. Reverend Pollard. Can you tell me—Dan Pollard, Reverend Dan Pollard in Karump—I can't pronounce the Oblast.

Amb. SEIPLE. Krai.

Mr. HOYER. Krai. The last word is a little easier.

(Laughter.)

Amb. SEIPLE. This is a complicated case that involves both a situation on the ground in Russia and an attempt to either change Articles of Incorporation so they could be registered, and a supporter back in the state who refused to allow those changes to be made.

And without being any more specific than that, it is one that—and if Dan Pollard was here we'd talk with him. It's one that got argued and never got completely resolved. Some of the problems of that were the inability to make the U.S. connection work in that case. The supporter for the Ministry—money was coming from the United States—and simply did not want to render any more to Caesar and so pulled back.

And that complicates an easy rendering of whose fault was it ultimately. But it was a case that was argued that we felt came down on the wrong side. It is an example of where—what happens out in the provinces. This was a Far Eastern Russian province, is—does not always match what the law was designed to do coming out of Moscow. Uneven.

Mr. HOYER. Let me relate briefly an experience I had in I think it was 1987. Maybe it was '86. I had a meeting in Moscow with the individual who was then in charge of issuing exit visas. A gentleman had gone to—or I think it was the husband, it may have been the wife. It may have been the wife—had gone to court for the purposes of ensuring that the family objection would not apply.

I do not know how familiar you are with that, but in—one of the objections that they gave to issuing visas was that you had family obligations, needed support, or whatever.

The court had ruled, no, it did not apply. I asked the high-ranking Russian official in Moscow about the case. I said, "It's my understanding that the court then changed their opinion." He said, "Yes, they did. I called them up and told them they had made a mistake."

He told me that without any feelings that somehow I would think that was an inappropriate relationship between the executive and the judicial branches of government. He thought that was appropriate. Clearly, he knew what the law ought to be. The court had made a mistake. He, in effect, directed them to change their view.

That psychology, obviously, is a very difficult one to change. And, therefore, we ought to—we need to watch very carefully these local officials who may think that the courts really are advisory only in nature.

Let me go on to another issue. The Patriarch of the Orthodox Church has spoken of the Russian government's anti-terrorist operation in Chechnya. To your knowledge, have other religious leaders in Russia, of other than Orthodox churches, spoken out on behalf, or in opposition to, made their views known on the Chechnya operation?

Amb. SEIPLE. No. To my knowledge, I have not heard of anyone other than this individual. I would be hesitant to read anything into that, however. I, obviously, do not think we should impugn motives or lack of motives of what was said or what was not said.

But the specific answer to the question—this is the only voice that I have heard speaking in favor of the Chechen initiative.

Mr. HOYER. Have we seen—and I think you're correct on that. I accept that. Have we seen any manifestations against Muslims as a result of the Chechnya war?

Amb. SEIPLE. Well, this is hard to tease out. Obviously, in the registration process, it has slowed down for Muslims. It has slowed down in the North Caucasus. This is one of those areas that we have to watch very carefully.

And to make sure that the war—that the Chechens haven't called a religious war, and the Russians haven't called a religious war—does

not have yet another negative impact and claim yet another victim in a war that essentially has been fought without nuance, as you know.

But, again, the specific answer—we've seen the registration slowed down. I think this is something to watch. This is probably the first indication we might get in terms of what is happening out in the provinces and how the Muslim faith is being taken care of legislatively.

Mr. HOYER. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. SMITH. Mr. Clement?

Mr. CLEMENT. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Ambassador, I would like to ask you about the '97 law that is on the books now. How much influence did the Russian Orthodox Church have to do with the passage of that law?

Amb. SEIPLE. Well, the fact that they had one in 1990 that we were all happy with we are trying to figure out, everyone would try to figure out, why does it need to be changed? And then the arguments that were put forth, as has been mentioned before by the Vice President, by the President, by everybody that this was not something that we felt was a good idea—and, by the way, a law that Yeltsin, in its original form, vetoed; came back in the same form later on and he signed it. Why did he do that?

There is no question. No one doubts this. No one denies this—that the Russian Orthodox Church had a role in that. There are other silent partners to that church. It was not the only church. I think it is fair to say that the Muslim Church or the Muslim mosque or the Muslim religion also were pleased with the direction that this had gone.

Now, primarily, the initiative was because of need to push back in terms of what was happening in terms of foreign missionary activity, which was really rather intense in the 1990s. For whatever reason, we ended up with a law that was a giant step backwards.

Mr. CLEMENT. How many of our European allies and other nations have pressed Russia to uphold its religious freedom commitments?

Amb. SEIPLE. Well, we have good allies on the European front. We have some that do not take us very far on these issues in human rights. But we have been able to work quite effectively with OSCE in pressing these issues.

There is something else that never gets spoken, but because I had this experience yesterday let me put it out here. I had one of the European Ambassador Deputy Chief of Missions come in and talk to me about our legislation. They could not do what we did with the IRFA Act. They would not take that approach.

But they said, "We are really glad that you did, because when you go out in front, when America takes the lead on these issues, it provides cover for us to come in behind and do the things that we are effective at doing."

So you knock and you become visible and you do the big part, and we will do all the things that we can do. They are the allies that we need to cultivate. They are the allies that I continue to press to have something akin to what we have here within government on international religious freedom issues. They are the ones that we can work together and create multilateral strength to push back against what might happen, potentially may happen, in Russia in the future.

Mr. CLEMENT. Will these incidents and concerns be reviewed during the United Nations Human Rights Commission next month?

Amb. SEIPLE. The Human Rights Commission in Geneva?

Mr. CLEMENT. Yes.

Amb. SEIPLE. Yes. The Human Rights Commission, which is a 6-week affair, with plenty of opportunities for side bars and meetings in and around everything else, there's an awful lot of good work that takes place in, obviously, the overarching category we are talking about—human rights.

But we will have folks there for the entire time, and issues that we feel need to be pursued at that time, regardless of the country—Russia—or not will get talked through with our counterparts. It's another opportunity, a good opportunity, to do it.

Mr. CLEMENT. I know you've already mentioned one case I was interested in that Congressman Hoyer asked you about a while ago. But I was going to ask you about this other case about the judge who was recently removed from her position because she's a member of a Pentecostal church. Can you expand on that or—

Amb. SEIPLE. I can't. I would like to take the question and come back to you on that. Again, is this the canary in the mineshaft? We treat every one of these as if they were. But I can't give you any more of an update than what you already have. This is one that we should follow together. I would like to take the question and come back to you on that.

Mr. CLEMENT. Thank you.

Mr. SMITH. Thank you very much, Mr. Clement.

Let me ask one final question, Mr. Ambassador. The Union of Councils for Soviet Jewry—Soviet Jews—has a devastating report that they have released.

As a matter of fact, I will never forget when we heard from Micah Natalin, I guess it was about 2 years ago, he maybe even coined the phrase that what was going on in Russia then was the privatizing of anti-Semitism. That the forces that be, the people who should be mitigating and prosecuting this kind of egregious behavior, were literally looking the other way and just letting it go on.

In his report, he and his organization point out that there is—and I quote them—“There is a dangerous rising tide of anti-Semitism and religious persecution that is both official and grass-roots across the Russian Federation. It is supported by a pervasive and dedicated post-Soviet infrastructure comprising the Communist party, the corrupted, unreformed organs of the justice system, and security apparatus, the neo-fascist Russian national unity movement, and the Moscow Patriarchy of the Russian Orthodox Church. It operates with complete impunity, sending the message that neither the central nor local government will provide for the physical or political safety of Russian Jews.”

And then it is filled with one example after another of this terrible behavior. They have a number of recommendations in here on what could be done. But the bottom line is, and especially since there may be a period of flux now where things could go from bad to worse according to the Union of Councils for Soviet Jews, it is already a cauldron.

What is your view of these recommendations of the basic information contained within this piece? And is the anti-Semitic behavior as egregious as laid out in this book?

Amb. SEIPLE. Well, I just got the book today.

Mr. SMITH. Okay.

Amb. SEIPLE. But let me comment in general. First of all, I think, given the history of anti-Semitism in Russia, we always need to be on

the alert for it. About a year ago when comments were made in the Duma, a number of people in and out of government from the United States rose up quickly, vociferously, and demanded that it cease, demanded that there be apologies.

We were put off by the fact that the response was not as vigorous as we felt it was—it deserved to be. But we saw that.

Now, has that gone away? Is there an intellectual discipline that does not let it rear its head? Well, that works well for a while, but when times are tough sometimes the heart is exposed and the heart transcends the head on these issues.

The interesting thing now, in kind of a perverse way, Chechnya is the issue, is the scapegoat, has taken the place of the anti-Semitic remark. We had Rabbi Goldschmidt here about a week ago, when we asked him that question, Ambassador Sestanovich talked—talking with him and he mentioned this.

We do not take any delight in that. Again, this is something that at some point in time we'd love to see totally eradicated. In the meantime, the only way to deal with this is to be loud, early, and often, and to shout down this kind of behavior, this kind of thinking, and to make sure that it has absolutely no traction, and whoever is delivering it are exposed for who they are.

Mr. SMITH. Could you comment, if you would, on the Russian national unity? Are they analogous to the Hitler Youth? I mean, it would appear, based on what I have read from other sources and then again what is actually contained within this book, that we are talking about an organization of young people that could be the harbinger of very grave actions in the not-too-distant future.

Amb. SEIPLE. Let me look at the book and look at that, and I, again, would like to take that question.

Mr. SMITH. If you can get back to us and provide that—

Amb. SEIPLE. Yes.

Mr. SMITH.—for the record, we would be most appreciative.

Any other questions from the panelists?

Mr. HOYER. Mr. Chairman, if I could.

Mr. SMITH. Sure.

Mr. HOYER. I hope you do not consider this an unfair question, because to some degree it does not deal with the subject matter of the hearing. But it does deal, I think, with the subject matter of your expertise. I refer to the Commission on International Religious Freedom, of which you're an ex-officio member.

And I am not an expert on this, but the perception of some that the Commission has done two things, chosen to focus primarily on three countries—China, the Sudan, and Russia, which are, obviously, getting a lot of attention. Russia is getting attention at this hearing, and those two countries are getting a lot of attention, particularly China, at this point in time, as a result of WTO and PNTR.

There also is some concern that what is being undertaken is more studies and more, in effect, what is wrong, as opposed to suggestions as to what we ought to be doing.

So my question is twofold. If you do not think this is appropriate or the proper forum in which to answer this, I will certainly take that answer. But, first of all, I think the Congress really did expect a broader focused Commission. There are problems in many, many countries of the world dealing with religious freedom. They are not limited to these three. Russia and China, in particular, are obviously countries that

get great concern.

But also, that the Congress wanted to have some substantive recommendation as to what it could do and what America could do to further religious freedom in these areas.

So, essentially, what I am saying, I suppose, is the Commission limiting itself in terms of its scope? And are they plowing ground that has been plowed and not addressing so much what we can do as a result of what exists?

Amb. SEIPLE. I think you need to give the Commission more time. The Commission was put together late, much later than anybody wanted. The Commission was funded late, which has implications for staffing, all those kinds of things.

Yet I think when you see the report coming out in May, there will be something that is new in there that is not simply a restating of what has been or what my office has done. My concern, going through this for the first time, is that Commission would simply be a group of folks who look over my shoulder. That hasn't happened.

(Laughter.)

But that hasn't happened. And they have chosen specifically—and I think understandably—China and Sudan are two countries that, gee, we need all the help we can get. These things are rapidly approaching that word of intractability that we hate to see in terms of conflicts that can't be put to rest or mindsets that can't be put to rest.

So I think they were right, and also with the choice of Russia because of the uncertainty of this context, the fact that they are less than 10 years away from the totalitarianism of atheistic Communism. There is an awful lot to witness.

I have been to Russia as part of this job. It's a very rich country in many, many respects. This gives them a chance to look at this.

That is not to say that they do not take advantage or make sure that when issues come up outside of those areas they do not respond to them. They do. Three beheadees are up in the block again in Iran to be beheaded, to be hung or beheaded, to be executed. That is something that needs an immediate reaction to.

There is a situation with a woman in northwest China. Now, this is one of their countries, but it is specific within the larger context—that is being harassed in a way that—it is just another one of those unconscionable kinds of situations. Take a position on that.

And anywhere in the world—the Saudi Arabia situation, the Egyptian situation with El Kasheh—these issues when they come up, if the Commission feels that it should make a statement, take a stand, suggest going forward, they will stop work on whatever they are doing and do that.

Now, to go back to where I started, I do think, given all of these situations and how the Commission has chosen to operate, I can remember my very first year here, which was last year. It's not easy to start from scratch in a context where everybody has—either their job is made up or their mind is made up, or both. They got going late. They got going strong.

They had a wonderful hearing—very important hearing on Sudan on Tuesday. We've got another one coming up on China in Los Angeles next month. I would give them the grace of time because I know their hearts are right. I know the passion of the people. These are distinguished folks who are putting in a lot of time.

We have a fantastic chair in David Sapperstein, and I think a lot of good is going to come out. That will not be simply an overlap of what my office has done.

Mr. HOYER. Thank you, Mr. Ambassador.

Let me make a few remarks about my experience in the Helsinki Commission, and I have been on the Commission since 1985. I succeeded Dante Fascell. I do not know how much you've been immersed in the Helsinki process, but the first review conference was held in Belgrade. And Ambassador Goldberg was our representative.

And over the very stringent objection of the State Department, Ambassador Goldberg, at that review conference, started to mention names and specific cases. Our own State Department, at that point in time, felt very uncomfortable about that. The obvious response of the Soviets was that these were internal matters.

But to the extent—and I asked you about the Pollard case specifically. Americans and the world tend to get issues much better when they can personalize them, when they can see the direct impact on individuals or groups, particular religious groups. And so the Commission, I would hope, would focus on that.

You mentioned in China, and obviously a far region of China. Or specific cases of an Egyptian or something else. Because what it did in terms of the Helsinki process, it made it very uncomfortable in that context for the Soviets to respond or for the satellite countries to respond.

And it was the continued discussion of those, and the bringing of light of those individual cases, and relating them to the general principles, that ultimately, in my opinion, as much as our—and I think, frankly, President Reagan was successful in allowing Gorbachev to convince his industrial military complex that the jig was up, we had too much money, that the arms race had to be, and they had to change their society to what—Perestroika and Glasnost.

But I would hope that the Commission would help us. Our staff does an extraordinarily good job. Does this say “shut up”?

(Laughter.)

Oh, okay. It does say “shut up.” I am taking the Rabbi's time. But in any event, I will cease and desist, but we need to focus on individual cases and then relate them to the general principles—in this case, religious freedom. We galvanize public opinion, both here in this country and around the world.

Amb. SEIPLE. I am delighted to hear you say that. So many times people can get lost in legal briefs or the horizon of our geopolitical understandings or our philosophical rhetoric.

Mr. HOYER. Right.

Amb. SEIPLE. There are two things that happened this last week. Very briefly, there's a priest in China, 80 years old, simply wants to maintain his allegiance in his faith to the Pope in Rome. He has already spent 30 years in jail. He had 150 police come to his home at midnight to arrest him and to put him back in jail.

These are real people. And there is nothing that more suggests the bankruptcy of the Communist system and what we have to face in the world as we take a person like this and see what has happened, see what he has paid for, see what his price tag has been to be true to what he believes, how he believes, who he worships, how he worships.

Second instance—a week ago Tuesday, Antonov aircraft flying over a town in Sudan near the mountains dropped a couple of bombs. Fourteen children in a first grade class studying English outside under a tree, and their 22-year old teacher, ripped apart. Seventeen to 19 were wounded. Some more may die.

There is nothing more that brings home the issue of what is at stake. People die because we can't fix religious freedom issues. People who have a face, who have a pulse, who have a personality.

I carry a picture of a woman by the name of Mary in Lebanon with me all the time because of what she means to the issue of religious freedom. Called to renounce her faith or die, she said no. A bullet went through her neck; she is a paraplegic. These things happen.

They do not have to happen. It's because we do not respect differences, because we do not understand common sense, because we do not have a high enough opinion of human nature, or because human decency, sanctity of life issues get brushed aside.

So human rights is not something that simply comes out of a legal brief and a whole bunch of Article 18s. For us, these are real live people, and I very much appreciate your taking a little more time to remind us of that.

Mr. HOYER. Hopefully, the Rabbi will as well.

Mr. SMITH. Thank you, Ambassador Seiple, and thank you—and I will only take 30 seconds. Thank you for bringing up that case. Even though it is not an OSCE country, yesterday I raised the case of the Beijing Province Bishop, 150 people as well, making—trying to make my case, maybe unsuccessfully, as to why the normal trade relationship—the NTR—or MFN should not go forward permanently, because China is like perhaps Russia, but even more so, going in the opposite direction when it comes to religious persecution.

They are in a high tide right now. The Falan Gong certainly has experienced the lash as well.

So I do thank you for bringing that up, and I agree with my good friend from Maryland on the issues he raised.

I would like to thank you, Ambassador, and ask—since the Rabbi, regrettably, has to leave for a flight very shortly, Rabbi Levi Shemtov, would ask him if he would begin his testimony, and then the remainder of our panel will follow right after.

He's the Director of the Washington Office of the American Friends of Lubavitch. Rabbi Shemtov was ordained in 1990 at the Central Lubavitch Yashiva in Brooklyn, New York, and has served in Jewish education and community leadership positions in the United States, Asia, South America, and Australia.

Rabbi Shemtov will be speaking on behalf of Rabbi Lazar. Rabbi Lazar is the senior representative of Lubavitch in Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States, as well as the Chief Rabbi of the Federation of Jewish Communities in the CIS.

Rabbi?

TESTIMONY OF RABBI LEV SHEMTOV, DIRECTOR, AMERICAN FRIENDS OF LUBAVITCH

Rabbi SHEMTOV. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and members of the Commission, for inviting me here today to report on several issues presently affecting the Jewish community in Russia. As we shall see

in certain points made later in my testimony, this Commission has accomplished much and continues to lead in monitoring and encouraging religious freedom in Russia and elsewhere.

First, I would like to address the issue of religious freedom itself. At present, Judaism is one of four religions officially recognized in Russia, all of whom have had to re-register since the new law took effect in 1997, as the Ambassador mentioned. Others can register, not as religions but as different types of non-religious organizations.

When this law was initially passed there was great concern about the government getting involved in determining the validity of religions. In the past, this had led to ugly oppression and even threats to the very pillars of safety, identity, and well-being of Jews.

Having struggled successfully to keep the spiritual flame of Jewish life in Russia alive without interruption—even in the face of the brutal Communist rule and efforts to suppress it—the Chabad-Lubavitch movement is all too aware of the serious problems which can arise when the government dictates which religion is legitimate.

The government's reasoning behind the new law, we were told, was to avoid the use by unscrupulous people of the shield of religious organizational status to engage in practices that might be harmful to unsuspecting citizens. We were also told that there were many cases of fraud and misinformation, where the people who were affected neglected to check the bona fides of the offending entities due to their identification and authorization by the government as religious institutions.

While we are also concerned about some implications of this law, it does not appear to directly adversely affect the Jewish community in Russia at this particular time.

I was asked to also mention that Mark Levin at the National Conference of Soviet Jewry has just returned from Moscow, where he had the opportunity to raise concern about this Russian religion law with Duma Chairman Gennedy Seleznev, in the presence of the Chairman of the Duma's Committee on State Religions.

Mr. Levin pressed both men on the serious problems of this law, stressing its harmful nature, regardless of the fact that Jews are among those groups favored as traditional religions.

In compliance with the law, however, all the Jewish communities had to re-register. We did not encounter unnecessary obstacles in this process. On the contrary, we were given the necessary assistance to ensure that this would be effected as fully and quickly as possible.

In November of 1999, some 82 communities from across Russia, through their rabbinical and lay leadership, met in Moscow to organize themselves under the umbrella of the Federation of Jewish Communities, which was established and officially registered in December of 1998.

Mr. Boris Yeltsin, then still President of the Russian Federation, sent personal representatives to relay his greetings to the meeting and to convey that he wants to lend the support of his administration to the mission of the Federation.

Acting President Vladimir Putin, who was then Prime Minister, could not attend but chose to receive the leadership of the Federation personally a week later. During that meeting, which was described by those who participated as very warm, supportive, and substantive, the present situation of the Jewish community in Russia was discussed in some detail.

Mr. Putin pledged to work together to ensure that religious liberty will continue to be enjoyed by the community. Central to this is also his commitment, expressed at that meeting, to fighting and hopefully eradicating anti-Semitism, which I will discuss in a moment.

There is a law, which was enacted on April 23, 1993, which stipulates that every building which belonged to a religious community before the Bolshevik revolution should be returned. This process, while indeed progressing, is doing so at a very slow pace.

For example, in Khabarovsk, in the Far Eastern region, even after this law was enacted, the building slated to be returned was demolished by a commercial enterprise authorized by the city, and an attempt was made to build a commercial center at the site. But a year ago, the community finally succeeded in receiving the land back and has begun to build a synagogue and Jewish Community Center there.

In some cases, such as Kazan, Samara, and others, the properties were returned and are now functioning as vibrant synagogues and Jewish community institutions. In other places like Saratov and Bryansk, we are still waiting for the relevant authorities to facilitate the return of those buildings to the communities.

Acting President Putin said that he wants to help open more Jewish schools and institutions, so that the Jews who live in Russia should have the structure necessary for their spiritual well-being and general feeling of security.

He also stressed the need and his willingness to continue to return remaining synagogues and buildings that were expropriated by the Communists to the relevant Jewish communities. And, additionally, he underscored the need to rebuild what was once one of the largest and greatest of Jewish communities in the world.

We have reason to be confident about his commitment to this. Incidentally, when Mr. Putin was Deputy Mayor of St. Petersburg, the Jewish community there was anxious to open a Jewish school. The official responsible for authorizing this was hesitant to because he himself was Jewish and worried that it would be seen as favoritism for an institution of his own personal faith.

Mr. Putin, who, as we heard before is not of the Jewish faith, was also in a position to authorize the application, and he volunteered to do so instead so that it would not be delayed longer than necessary. We would hope that this was not an isolated incident but might indicate a general sensitivity on his part to issues of this nature.

As I am sure you are well aware, in recent years, the incidents of anti-Semitism in Russia have reached alarming levels. Many have already been reported in the media and also before this Committee. In the past, it is true that we were especially horrified by acts of anti-Semitism or hate, but there was also an undeniable general trend toward lawlessness, which was affecting Russian society at large. This was undermining the basic quality of life even further for so many millions of its citizens already living under very tough conditions.

At the same time, it must also be noted that since August of '99, when a savage attack at the Choral Synagogue in Moscow and the attempted bombing of the Bolshoya Boronya Synagogue followed a few days later, the situation has improved substantially. This trend seems to be stemming and even reversing. It also appears that crime in Russia generally is falling somewhat. Maybe this can be attributed to an increasing sense of the need for law and order in Russia, which is slowing being implemented.

While the rate of crime is declining, we are still disturbed, however, that the perpetrators of the crimes committed are still at large. While efforts to find and punish these criminals are often announced, the results, with very rare exceptions, are certainly too few and weak.

Some might even suggest that the decline in crime is somehow coincident with Vladimir Putin's rise to power, and maybe a sincere desire on his part to reestablish a more lawful atmosphere. The fact remains, however, that the incidents of anti-Semitism and hate have dropped in these past months. We hope that, please God, this trend will continue until we no longer have a need to report these types of criminal acts.

While the reasons within Russia for the dropping rate of anti-Semitic crimes being debatable, there is, however, the undeniable assertion that consistent and bipartisan support of religious freedom by the U.S. Congress and the administration is very important and certainly effective in the struggle against religious and ethnic intolerance.

There are many examples. One of the criminal acts referred to was the bombing of the Marina Roshcha Synagogue in May 1998. The swift and stern condemnation of that act by both the State Department spokesman and the Chairman of the House International Relations Committee, as well as this very Commission, served to reassure and bolster the Jewish community in Russia at one of its most vulnerable moments in recent memory.

The perpetrators of ugly anti-Semitic acts were certainly measuring the extent to which their crimes there could go unnoticed or unpunished. The clear and timely answer was a definite message to them; that extent is not very far.

It is perhaps more than a coincidence that following the above-mentioned response in no uncertain terms, then-President Yeltsin took the unprecedented step of clearly condemning anti-Semitism on Russian national television.

It might not always be easy to catch those responsible, but the message of shock certainly made an impact. Maybe because from these shores the message went forth that though we as Americans may differ on many issues, there is an unequivocal voice when it comes to hatred or religious or ethnic intolerance—the voice of protest, horror, and disgust.

The Russian community generally, and the Jewish community in Russia, watch carefully to see how the Jewish community is perceived abroad and specifically in the United States. During his visit to Moscow in 1999, President Clinton met with the senior Lubavitch emissary in Russia, Rabbi Berel Lazar, and through him sent a handwritten and personal message of support to the community.

When the Secretary of State or Congressional delegations visit Moscow and other cities, much attention is paid to whether a visit to a synagogue or meeting with Jewish leadership is on the itinerary.

I just want to turn from my statement to say that I remember Congressman Hoyer was part of the delegation, I believe it was a year and a half or 2 years ago, soon after the bombing of the synagogue. That sent a very clear message of support to the community. I remember that vividly, seeing the photos of that visit, and that might just be a very good example of what I am saying.

Back to my statement. It must also be noted that the successive ambassadors of the United States to Russia and their Embassy personnel have been particularly helpful. They have constantly been con-

siderate, effective, and responsive when called upon, and have expressed concern throughout for the community's welfare.

It is imperative that these contacts and demonstrations of support continue, for they send a message that America and the world are watching. How the Jewish community is regarded—and the basic rights they enjoy—become not footnotes in the general world opinion of Russia, but actually get the focus and respect they deserve.

And we should not underestimate this. The support of the community by American officials translates into a sense among Jews living in Russia that there are those who care and will do everything possible to ensure that they are not mistreated or forgotten.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. SMITH. Thank you very much, Rabbi. I know that your time is very limited. Just one brief question from me, and I have many others, but I would like to just ask you about the Russian National Unity Organization, the neo-Nazi group.

What is your understanding of that organization? Are they like the Hitler Youth? They are apparently not only engaged in gross anti-Semitism, but are very active in networking, leafleting, and in committing acts of violence.

Rabbi SHEMTOV. One thing I can tell you, I am too young to know exactly what Hitler's Youth were.

Mr. SMITH. I have only read about it in history books.

Rabbi SHEMTOV. I can only rely on what I have read, like you can. But one thing I do know is that many hints following these acts in the initial investigations did point in that direction. I believe that in one or two cases the person who was caught at one of these, if I am not mistaken, actually announced himself as a member. Correct me if I have the wrong organization, but I think that was the case.

Mr. SMITH. Can I just ask you again, in follow up to that, and you've made some positive statements on the need to fight anti-Semitism, which are made by many of the leaders of Russia.

But since there has been a profound decentralization, the concern is—and, again, this organization—this book is filled with examples in one region after another where these incidents have occurred, with little or no prosecution, if not compliance or complicity by the authorities. That raises the specter of this rogue, hate-filled organization just spreading its venom all over Russia.

Rabbi SHEMTOV. Well, I actually spoke with Rabbi Lazar this morning, and I asked him this exact question myself. And, you know, one of the things that he expressed concern about and asked me to mention was the fact that the perpetrators seem not to get caught. He said that it is because it is not perceived as a high enough priority with regard to the image of the law enforcement authorities.

Somehow they feel that cracking down generally is enough to deter anti-Semitism. But, in practice, it may not be so. Like I said in my statement, you know, it might be that Acting President Putin is dedicated to sending a message that it won't be tolerated, but on a practical level, not catching the people who do these things, sends a message to the petty individual independent criminals that maybe they can get away with it.

Mr. SMITH. Let me just say again that this Commission, and I think you would agree fully, will be monitoring and pushing this very—we want to find out more about their activities, how big they are. I have

heard varying estimates about how big they are. Whether or not these groups are expanding. You know, I have seen pictures of like the skinheads and other—

Rabbi SHEMTOV. They do resemble the Hitler Youth.

Mr. SMITH. They certainly do—the Heil Hitler sign. So we are going to be watching this very closely, and that will be part of our dialogue with the Russian government, at least as far as this particular member and Chairman of this Commission.

Mr. Hoyer, I know you've got to go, too.

Mr. HOYER. Actually, what they look like is not nearly as important as what they think like. The Hitler Youth come in many different sizes, shapes, colors. Not the Hitler Youth, but I think, unfortunately, every country experiences too many who hate.

Rabbi, thank you for your testimony. Unfortunately, I have to leave. I want to apologize to the other witnesses that I won't be able to hear them. But I will review their testimony.

And, Rabbi, I thank you for mentioning our visit to the synagogue, which I mentioned in my statement as well. Again, it is raising the flag and showing concern in individual cases that I think makes the larger message, and you made that point again in response to the Chairman's question about catching—you referred to them as petty, and I know what you mean. They are small. They are not the big. But to the extent that we take care of the details, the general principles may fall in place.

Rabbi SHEMTOV. What I meant to say, by the way, was—

Mr. HOYER. No, I was not criticizing what you said. I—

Rabbi SHEMTOV.—private individuals and organizations.

Mr. HOYER. Yes, I knew exactly what you meant and appreciated what you meant. It was not a criticism. But I thank you for your testimony and thank you for your work.

Mr. Chairman, I apologize for having to leave.

Mr. SMITH. Thank you, Mr. Hoyer.

Rabbi SHEMTOV. Just before I depart, I would just like to say one last thing—is that you see the comparisons to hate groups that existed earlier in the century. But I think that it is important to note and to be thankful for that the silence and indifference that happened earlier does not happen again. I think the Commission, under your chairmanship, is making sure that is the case.

Mr. SMITH. Thank you, Rabbi.

We are joined by many others who do that, and not the least of which are people like yourself. So thank you for your testimony, and I hope you make your plane.

Rabbi SHEMTOV. Thank you.

Mr. SMITH. I would like to ask our remaining witnesses if they would proceed to the witness table. Our first witness will be Pastor Igor Nikitin of St. Petersburg. Pastor Nikitin is Chairman of the association of Christian Churches, an association of 150 evangelical Christian churches working together in Russia for evangelizing, social work, and legal assistance.

We also have a most respected and active clergyman of the Orthodox faith, the Very Reverend Father Leonid Kishkovsky. Father Kishkovsky is the pastor of Our Lady of Kazan Russian Orthodox Church in Sea Cliff, New York, as well as an Ecumenical Officer of the Orthodox Church of America, and editor of the monthly newspaper, *The Orthodox Church*.

Our final witness is Anatoly Krasikov, Chairman of the Russian Chapter of the International Association for Religious Freedom. He is currently a public policy scholar at the Woodrow Wilson International Center. I remember Mr. Krasikov from our first meetings in Moscow in January of 1998 on religious liberty, and it is a pleasure to see him here as well.

And, again, I look forward to the testimony of our witnesses.

**TESTIMONY OF PASTOR IGOR NIKITIN, CHAIRMAN,
ASSOCIATION OF CHRISTIAN CHURCHES,
ST. PETERSBURG, RUSSIA**

Pastor NIKITIN. On behalf of the Christian churches of Russia and several denominations that I represent, I want to thank you for your interest and the constant support of democracy and human rights and the religious freedom of Russia.

This is a very special time for my country, and we—all over the country we can see the big growth of interest toward spiritual matters, and it is very understandable because the Russian society, bothered with—as you know, with economical difficulties, unfaithful promises, a high level of crime. A new overwhelming problem for us has become illegal drugs. In the larger cities, up to 70 percent of the young people before the age of 17 are already using the drugs. The moral condition is destroying the nation.

At the same time, many Russians find their answers in evangelical faith. A number of congregations are growing, and over—our office has a very close relationship with more than 4,000 churches and groups throughout Russia. Growing also in the trust of the society towards the Protestant and Evangelical faith.

A big difference in the comprehension of human rights we felt after the visit of Mr. Smith to St. Petersburg, and we appreciate that because we know that he came at a very special time for us. I want to tell you that you came to the right place, too, because St. Petersburg is known as a very tolerant city.

We can see in the Nevsky Prospect, the main street in St. Petersburg, eight churches built of different confessions. So in that time, we were really concerned about our future.

We had several churches, just in a few months before Congressman Smith came to St. Petersburg, burned down. There was enormous pressure on most of our churches. So I believe the Lord himself sent Mr. Smith to St. Petersburg.

The result of those meetings were very exciting for us, because the administration of St. Petersburg started looking at the Christian churches as a stability of partnership and administration—in fact, administration of the St. Petersburg and the cessation of Christian churches, what I represent, signed the agreement of cooperation admitting that the spiritual and moral condition of the society and the future economical development, in many ways, impacts social problems.

So this agreement did not just open the doors for us to minister in the different orphanages and hospitals, schools, ministering to elderly people, but also developed a unique partnership between American churches, American ministries, and the Russian ministries.

And the result of these meetings, I believe, there was very important events happened, just in the last few months with American organization, Feed the Hungry. We give over 120 tons of food directly to the hands of the people.

In the partnership with the Victory Christian Centers, we are holding a celebration of 2,000 years of Christianity, and more than 30,000 people came to those celebrations and gave—and had a deeper commitment of their faith.

With the cooperation of a number of churches in Pennsylvania, we are holding a large Bible project. More than 225,000 Bibles were put to the hands of the people. Especially important for us was helping in the prisons all over the country.

Now the prison—which was built for 1,000 prisoners and now houses more than 10,000 prisoners—we had the opportunity to bring food there because the condition of the prison is terrible. The prisoners take shifts to sleep. So we were able to bring food. We were able to bring the literature, Christian literature there. And also in each cell we put speaker phones for prisoners to hear the news and the spiritual messages.

So I believe that the changes will remain. The very short visit to St. Petersburg of the delegation from Congress influenced the whole nation because this agreement that we signed with the Mayor's office was sent all over the country, and to the different Mayor's offices where our churches are. We received a very good response from the different Mayor's offices and the different administration of different cities, like in Jabarsk, in the Far East, and Vladivostok.

So there were definitely changes initiated after the visit of the congressional delegation to just one city.

And I want to say, again, words of appreciation. It meant a lot for us, and the change—the atmosphere of our nation from Leningrad to Vladivostok.

We see also that there are difficulties that we have in our land, and especially we are concerned right now with the statements of the mass media and television. After Mr. Putin came into power, the mass media was constantly repeating that Russia has become a Russian Orthodox state.

So it really bother us as Christians especially because Moscow channels are always repeating that the leaders of the Orthodox states of Byelorussia, Ukraine, and Russia, are meeting together. So we have sent several letters to Mr. Putin with these concerns. We definitely do not like to see one religious denomination portrayed in the media as the main denomination and representative of Russia.

We are also concerned about several cases of persecution in the Urals, especially in Ekaterinberg. There is a New Life Church in the city of Ekaterinberg, with a Pastor Sudakoff. I recently met with him, and he said that for 2 years they have been harassed by Nazis, they are harassed by the Russian Orthodox Church, the administration of the city. So it is going on.

The same thing in Chuvashia, where there is a Pentecostal church that is about to close down. Again, even the laws seem to be not bringing this forth.

Also, the Kirov Christian Center has a similar situation, similar problem. In Rakutska, which is in Siberia, the Word of Life Church has been persecuted by administration.

We are also dealing with cases in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. We are inviting foreign missionaries to Russia and helping a lot of foreign missionaries. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is trying to stop giving religious status to foreign missionaries.

These are very difficult cases for us because we believe that our relationship between our countries depends on the missionaries to come and—missionaries can go back and forth in both countries.

So we are also concerned about the cases of our churches being set on fire in—just recently three churches of association—in fact, 2 weeks ago one church in Kaliningrad was set on fire. Since it is such a short time, we are, again, very concerned about these matters.

So, once again, I want to say thank you for helping us obtain our religious freedom. I appreciate Mr. Chairman and the delegation.

Thank you.

Mr. SMITH. Thank you very much Pastor Nikitin.

Father Kishkovsky? Did I get that right?

TESTIMONY OF FATHER LEONID KISHKOVSKY, PASTOR, OUR LADY OF KAZAN RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH

Rev. KISHKOVSKY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I regard it as a high privilege to be here in this room before you today, Mr. Chairman.

My first visit to Russia—to the Soviet Union—occurred in 1978, and on that occasion I visited some of the religious dissidents in Moscow and was monitored by the KGB very closely, and as a result of that monitoring I was denied Soviet visas for 10 years and returned to the Soviet Union only in 1988.

I regard it still as a badge of honor that I did visit the dissidents and that I was denied the visas, because it seems to me that is exactly what we needed to do at that time in order to give our support and show our solidarity to those who were, even then, raising their voices on behalf of religious liberty.

The ones I visited were Russian Orthodox priests, who were, in fact, raising their voices at that time for the religious liberty of all confessions and all religions in the totalitarian Soviet Union.

Now, in this room, everyone is aware, certainly, that 10 years ago the Soviet Union was a totalitarian, closed society. But I think at large in our society, the American society, this perhaps is almost nearly forgotten. It is simply a fact that only a short 10 years ago the Soviet Union, as a totalitarian empire, existed, and that totalitarian system had atheism, militant atheism, at its core.

And this atheism was not simply a philosophy; it was a way of persecution, a way of propaganda, a way of educating or mis-educating the people of the Soviet Union.

At the core of the totalitarian system, although it underwent certain changes of style and approach, nevertheless, was the idea that all religion is to be destroyed, and certainly in the Soviet Union one of the main targets to be destroyed was the Russian Orthodox Church, as well as all of the other Christian bodies and all of the other religions.

The 70 years or more of totalitarianism of the Soviet model obviously had its impact on society, on thought and psychology, on attitudes and assumptions, and all in the society have been affected, and the effects of the totalitarian system are still there to be seen and to be experienced. It will take decades to overcome the effects of the totalitarian system.

This is why, I suppose, a number of religious leaders in Russia, including Patriarch Alexsii of the Russian Orthodox Church, have stated that the rebuilding or restoring or renewing of human souls is by far the more difficult task, and to rebuild buildings is a relatively simple matter.

Nevertheless, buildings and institutions have been renewed and rebuilt for all religious communities. I am more familiar with the figures for the Russian Orthodox community, but I know that they are paralleled proportionately for the other religious communities.

So, in 1988, there were 49 churches in Moscow, Russian Orthodox churches. Today, there are over 350. In 1988, there were 16 monasteries in the Russian Orthodox Church. Today, there are nearly 400. In 1988, there were five theological schools in the Russian Orthodox Church. Today, there are over 50. So on, and so forth.

And these figures of growth and renewal and rebuilding certainly are paralleled for the Protestants, the Roman Catholics, the Muslims, the Jews, the Buddhists, and others.

Ambassador Seiple said an hour or so ago that Russia is a country on the cusp, and this is entirely accurate. About 9 years ago, a Moscow priest who has become a friend of mine, Father Alexander Borisov, gave a very vivid image for Russia—a Russia, at that time already, in which there were some people emerging who had nostalgia for the Soviet system.

And Father Borisov took a Biblical image and pointed out that in the story of Exodus, of the Hebrew people from the slavery in Egypt, towards the Promised Land, towards freedom, it took 40 years in the wilderness in order to bring forward new generations of people who were not accustomed and nostalgic with regards to slavery.

And his prediction was, 9 years ago, that it would take several generations, maybe 40 years or so, for Russia to emerge from the totalitarian mind set and psychology.

The fact that the country is on the cusp is shown by many things. One of our Embassy staff in Moscow recently told me a very vivid experience. He has taken it as a kind of private mission to wander through the newly rebuilt Christ the Savior Church in Moscow from time to time, and he has found many ordinary Russians wandering through that cathedral, lighting candles. Clearly, their conversation to him showed a kind of quiet pride that this religious monument had been rebuilt, that something of the pre-communist Russian history was reemerging.

A few days after one of those visits to Christ the Savior Church, this Embassy staff of ours was at the Foreign Ministry of Russia and mentioned its favorable impression of its wanderings through Christ the Savior Church. One of the officials of the Foreign Ministry said, "Well, that place was really a lot better when it was a swimming pool." There was a church there which Stalin destroyed, and the swimming pool was built instead.

Another demonstration that this is a country on the cusp is that a couple of years ago, during the last—next-to-the-last elections to the Duma, one of the Communist extremists in a speech had said, "Just as Christ the Savior Church could be built twice, so it can be destroyed twice."

And when I was in Russia with the Appeal of Conscience Foundation of Rabbi Schneider, we visited with Mr. Zyuganov. I asked Mr. Zyuganov whether he associated himself with that statement of his fellow Communists or not, and Mr. Zhuganov's answer was a little bit too flaccid and diplomatic for my taste.

Now, the effects of Communism are not to be observed only in society at large. In fact, they are to be observed also within the religious communities.

I attended, for example, a conference of the Russian Orthodox Church in 1994 in which the whole tone of the debate, the whole tone in which a very acrimonious debate within the church was being carried on, was a reminder to me of the extremism of the Bolshevik period. I actually made a speech at that conference and said, "This is spiritual Bolshevism, what is occurring here today."

Now, I do not say that in condemnatory tones. I am saying only descriptively that it is a society, and it is a people which need time in order to emerge from the decades of totalitarianism. Those whom we see as democrats and reformers in Russia are not at all exempt from a totalitarian mind set and from the Bolshevik attitudes. They are proponents sometimes of the right ideas, but the tone and style and orientation in which those ideas are promoted actually are echoes of the Communist and Bolshevik period.

Now, religious liberty—my impressions of the religious liberty question in Russia come in part from my frequent visits there as a priest of the Orthodox Church in America. I am also often in Russia under other flags.

I have been there frequently with the Appeal of Conscience Foundation and Rabbi Schneier. I have been there with the World Conference on Religion and Peace International, of which I am now the Vice Moderator. I have been there as a representative of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA, of which I served as President about 10 years ago.

Also, in Russia, among my friends and colleagues are, of course, many Russian Orthodox, but Protestants and Roman Catholics and Jews and Muslims as well. So what I am giving very briefly is, I think, a composite perspective—my perspective, but one that I have learned from conversations with many.

Clearly, it seems to me, the legislation of 1997 was flawed. It was flawed, and it ought not to have taken place. But it is also clear that at the federal level in Russia there have been, indeed, good faith commitments to deal equitably with religious communities and to observe the international norms when it comes to human rights and religious liberty.

The record has not been unflawed, but the effort of the federal authorities certainly has been generally in that direction. Especially, it seems to me, many of us will follow this closely. This can be said about the presidential administration.

Many people were extremely skeptical about the promises made by Mr. Andrei Loginov in 1997 and 1998. In fact, by and large, the actions of his office and the presidential administration tended, I think, in the right direction. It is a bit alarming that he has been—he had left his position on February 1st, and I spoke with him by telephone in Moscow when I was there last week.

According to his impressions, his successor is unlikely to have the religious component very much on his mind. And, therefore, I believe it is important for the U.S. Embassy, for the U.S. Congress when visiting there, for religious communities when visiting there, to make sure that the presidential administration remains somewhat focused on these issues, so that they do not remain only in the Duma or only in the Prime Minister's office or in the Ministry of Justice.

Several years ago a prominent Protestant, specially Baptist, leader in the United States asserted that the then-current situation as to religious life and liberty in Russia was worse than it was under Communism. Shortly after that comment was made, I was in Moscow and visited Peter Konovalchik, the leader of the Baptist community in the Russian Federation.

And I gave him this quote, and I asked him what he thought about it. Mr. Konovalchik was utterly amazed. He was stunned that such a claim could be made, because even though Mr. Konovalchik would be among the very first to say there are problems in Russia, certainly he could never even begin to imagine how it was possible to say that things were worse now than they were under Communism.

My point here is simply that what is needed on our part is vigilance, is careful and scrupulous attention to what is going on. What is needed from us is not hyperbole. Hyperbole may well end up being the prophecy which is fulfilled, because then we will act as if the hyperbole is already fact.

And, indeed, we may be helping some evil people to make that hyperbole into fact in the country of Russia.

A couple of comments that are, I think, pertinent but not directly related to the religious liberty issue as such, although there are relationships—you will see them—the question of missionaries.

Clearly, all of us who are convinced proponents of the religious liberty principle want religious liberty to be complete. And, therefore, the preaching and activity of religious missionaries is something that we would wish to defend.

What we need to realize, at least on a moral plane, not perhaps on a legal plane, is that there is collateral impact of missionary activity which is sometimes unexpected and unanalyzed.

Again, a few years ago, in Moscow, I was at an ecumenical conference involving Protestants, Orthodox Catholics, in which a Russian Orthodox priest from one of the newly-independent states in Central Asia went to the microphone and made an impassioned plea in a sense against missionary activity.

What he said was this. "In the city and in the country in which he is a priest, he is a Russian Orthodox Christian and a minority within a Muslim context." And he said that for decades and even centuries, as far as religion was concerned, Christians and Muslims in that place lived in peace.

Then, with the new and welcomed liberties, very, very high-profile missionaries came from the West and from the U.S. and began their missionary activity in the Muslim context. The average Muslim cannot tell the difference between Russian Orthodox, Protestant, or Catholic, just as the average American Christian cannot really tell the difference between Sunni and Shiite.

And, therefore, in that place, a mob gathered and marched. Against whom? Against the Russian Orthodox Church because they identified that as the place which was stimulating what they considered to be aggressive missionary propaganda against Islam.

Therefore, it is a moral appeal, not a legal one. I do think that missionaries, American missionaries, need to be aware of the collateral impact that can occur in social systems when new and high-profile missionary efforts are undertaken. Sometimes we unwittingly become the agents of social disruption and even violence, and I am sure that

is not what we want to be.

Finally, on the matter of Chechnya, because it was mentioned earlier and I have some recent impressions, I would like briefly to share them. In October, I met with the Muslim leadership in Moscow. In November, I was again in Moscow at an ecumenical conference—Christian—which had Muslim observers and leadership there as well.

My impression clearly was that the Muslim community, as well as some spokespersons for the Jewish community, were in fact very nuanced in their reaction to the Chechnya war. They did not seem to regard it as aggression because aggression, they would think, is one country against another. They seemed to regard it, along with the Russian Orthodox, as an action against secessionists who are violent, who are extremists, and who are creating very serious difficulties within all of Russia.

We must be mindful that most of the Muslims in Russia are not Chechen, and there are many Muslims in Russia—Moscow alone, I am told, has over one million residents who are Muslim. This is a city of about 10 or 11 million. Therefore, the Muslim presence is very strong, and it is not only Chechen. One observation.

Another observation—in October, from the Muslim community, I learned that the Mufti in Grozny had been pressed by the political and military leadership in Chechnya to declare the war against the Russian Federation a Jihad. He had flatly refused to do so, and was, therefore, quickly pushed out of Grozny and ended up quickly in the Russian-controlled territory of Chechnya.

The point here, I suppose, is that the extremism in Chechnya is not universal, that there are many Chechens who are not at all supportive of extremism or violence or terrorism.

And a final note—in some conversations with Chechen friends in Moscow, when I asked in October and November what their impression was, the first five minutes was a bitter litany of criticism of the actions—extreme actions—of the Russian federal forces. I listened to that very carefully and with great pain.

Then, I asked them, “And what do you think of the Chechen leadership?” After that I heard 20 minutes of the most bitter criticism of the Chechen leaders for being people who do not care for their people, for being people who were coopted by criminal circles, for being people who participated in hostage-taking, and all that litany of horror.

Therefore, the picture is extremely complicated and one that bears a great deal of attention, humanitarian care, and as much effort as we can give it in order to bring to an end, of course, violence against civilians.

I raised this issue with Patriarch Alexsii last week. He said, yes, of course—sadly, he agreed with me there are many people suffering. But he said not so much attention was given before when, in Chechnya, hostage-taking was epidemic.

Interestingly, I do not think he knew until I told him that the majority of the hostages in Chechnya were Chechen. Some were Russian, some were foreigners, some British were killed, but many, many, many of the hostages were Chechens. Therefore, it was a highly criminalized situation, highly violent, and in that respect Patriarch Alexsii is right.

There was violence before on a massive scale. There is violence now which should be brought to an end. But he does not see it as fair to identify the previous period as a period of peace and security, which it was not, and the present period as the only period of violence.

So, and one final image. In my home, on one of the cable stations, I get some Russian programming. I was quite interested, and I must say rather surprised that around January 7 and 8th, when Russian television was showing Russian Orthodox Christmas, equal attention was being given on Russian television to the ending of Ramadan. Interviews with Muslim clergy and with Muslim believers, showing the Muslim community in a positive light.

And that struck me as certainly a wise and planned move on the part of some people in the leadership in Russia to put forward an image of Islam alongside Christianity; that is, peaceful and committed to constructive work rather than to destructive violence.

Thank you.

Mr. SMITH. We thank you very much for your excellent testimony.

And we'd like to ask our final witness if he would—Professor Krasikov, if he would present his testimony now, and then we'll go to some questions.

**TESTIMONY OF ANATOLY KRASIKOV, CHAIRMAN, RUSSIAN
CHAPTER, INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR RELIGIOUS
LIBERTY, MOSCOW, RUSSIA**

Prof. KRASIKOV. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, ladies and gentlemen, one of the founding fathers of the United States, James Madison, warned in his book *Memorial and Remonstrance*, written more than 200 years ago, "When there is a union of state and church, this has often resulted in using religion to uphold political tyranny."

Madison's warning has proved extraordinarily true for many countries. On the territory of the Former Soviet Union, there are some new states, for example, Turkmenistan, where this political tyranny already exists. The Russian Federation, fortunately, is not Turkmenistan. However, we need to be vigilant in our country, in Russia, too. I am convinced of this.

At first glance, there is no justification for any kind of unsettling thoughts. Approval by the referendum in December 1993, the year of the "Yeltsin" Constitution, provided support for all international standards of human rights. In Article 14 of the fundamental law of the land straightforward states: "The Russian Federation shall be a secular state. No religion shall be declared an official or compulsory religion...All religious associations shall be separate from the state and shall be equal before the law." Nobody has suggested changing Article 13 of the Constitution, in accordance with doctrine that "no ideology shall be established as a state or compulsory ideology."

It seems Vladimir Putin is more or less in agreement with this. While giving a speech in January of this year at a reception at the Kremlin celebrating the two-thousand year anniversary of the birth of Christ, Putin announced that "there are different religions among the millions of Russians; however, all of us have one future, one country."

The Russian Orthodox Church (ROC), my church and the religious organization in Russia with the greatest following, has stated multiple times its opposition to a merger with the state. In one public speech not long after his election to the position of Patriarch of All Russia, Patriarch Aleksii the Second said, "The scenario of a state church has brought much hardship and many trials. The church should be sepa-

rate, truly separate from the government. It should have the right to evaluate all events that occur in country from the position of spirituality and morality. It cannot achieve this being of the government.”

In practice, however, we often find the opposite. A considerable part of the political elite, on one hand, and part of the Orthodox clergy, on the other hand, continue to undertake great efforts in an attempt to turn Orthodoxy into a new government ideology.

Politicians in Russia, as a rule, do not have even the smallest understanding of Orthodox theology. Its majority is far from being genuinely religious, as was the case during the Soviet era. Some of them—those who represent nationalist forces—are drawn to the perspective of creating a “monolithic union” of Russian society under a new flag.

God, for many of them, is simply a means for furthering their own power. These politicians want to force bishops of the ROC to play the role of protector of the “ideological purity” of society, which role was played in the pre-Yeltsin period by party committees of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU).

Supporters of the clericalization of the government, acting within the Russian Orthodox Church, are trying to bring potential members into the church by the means of secular authority. A product of the Soviet system, these people did not learn the meaning of genuine Christian missionary work.

However, they suggest that they can achieve their goals by different means; that is, by merging with the government structure, by monopolizing religious broadcasting on state television and radio, and by limiting the freedom of other denominations to preach.

Leaders of all religious organizations in Russia recognize the unique role which Orthodoxy has played in the history of Russia, beginning with its Christianization 1000 years ago in 988. However, they do not want to waive their constitutional rights. This issue has, in regards to the discriminatory law of 1997 “On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations,” provoked many serious discussions in society.

An official representative of human rights in the Russian Federation (RF) and a member of the Russian Duma from the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF), Oleg Mironov voted in favor of this law. However, in conclusion, when it was published later, in April, 1999, Oleg Mironov also admitted his perspective was in accordance neither with Russian pledges for a fair law, nor with international standards.

A month later, Metropolitan Kirill, the Director of the Department for External Church Relationships of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC), spoke before the Greek Parliament with the affirmation that present international norms in the realm of human rights were “*exclusively defined in terms of a western and liberal perspective,*” and that they are in need of revision.

On November 23, 1999, the Constitutional Court of the Russian Federation admitted to incorrectly giving the 1997 law retroactive power. This allowed for one of the dispositions of the law, which discriminated against a large group of “local” religious organizations, having been deprived henceforth of the right to legal counsel. The Constitutional Court did not review other articles of the law.

Life itself has discredited a different disposition of the law, which required the conclusion of the universal re-registration of religious organizations in Russia by December 31, 1999. The registration pro-

cess provided for the eventuality of liquidation, by due process, of those organizations that did not make it through the re-registration process. A number of local authorities have initiated legal cases with the goal of forbidding those organizations, excluding the Orthodox Church, which will not be re-registered in time. This has occurred, for example, in Chuvashia, and in the Voronezh and Tambov oblasts.

Although directed against “non-traditional” religions, this disposition of the law actually affected, first and foremost, the largest of all churches in Russia, the ROC. The ROC physically did not have enough time to complete the documents for the legalization of the majority of its parishes. The Federal DUMA just approved a one-year extension to the required period for the completion of registration. It now must be finished by December 31, 2000.

It is possible to find documents from local authorities in the archives of many religious organizations. These documents require that questions concerning all different religious organizations agree with the diocese (higher structure) and districts of churches (lower structure) in the ROC. These questions, in part, regard registration of the organization, construction or rental of a building for church services, and pronouncement of reconsideration within the government apparatus.

In conclusion, I ask the following question. Can Russia remain a secular government and the Russian Orthodox Church remain independent from the state or of the state? One thing is clear to me. While standard-bearers of totalitarianism have not yet acted against the current Constitution of the Russian Federation and against decisions of the higher-ups within the ROC, nothing is lost.

We are all grateful to the Congressmen and Government of the United States. I remember many conferences and many meetings we have had in Moscow and abroad concerning religious freedom and public politics in Russia. We are grateful to the international public for the interest expressed regarding the protection of religious freedom and freedom in general throughout the world.

We wish to remind those who insist on meddling in the affairs of other countries of that, which was discussed in accordance with the decision accepted at the OSCE (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe) conference in Moscow on October 3, 1991.

It was decided that, “questions concerning the rights of man, fundamental freedoms, democracy and supremacy of law, are of an international nature. These questions are independent of any domestic issues of any respective government.”

Thank you.

Mr. SMITH. Thank you very much for your testimony.

Let me just begin with Pastor Nikitin. You spoke about the progress that was being made in St. Petersburg, and that success was being shared with other cities. How is that—are individual church members taking that success as a prototype and then trying to replicate it, or is it going from government official to government official? How is the good word spreading?

Pastor NIKITIN. Yes, there are two ways. One way is that government officials, when they signed the agreement with the association there, had to send it to the different government organizations and to put statements in the public media.

Also, the churches want to share this, what's going on in St. Petersburg. And as a result of this agreement, we sent more than 4,000 letters to all of the church leaders to the country of Russia, and also we sent letters to the mayors and administrations of different cities where our churches are.

So we represent, in one way, church to the government and government to the church. It's very successful, as we can see, in the numbers—number of cities, especially in the little towns. We know the local administration, lots of ways there, or what we call Comm Red or Communist, or they are so-called Russian Orthodox in lots of ways.

So they are aggressive against other religions. So our letters of support, there's definitely an explanation—the agreements which Russia signed with OSCE—during the OSCE meetings is definitely helping to see the importance of religion freedom in Russia.

Mr. SMITH. You mentioned some church burnings and arrests.

Pastor NIKITIN. Yes.

Mr. SMITH. Were any perpetrators ever apprehended for the church burnings? Was it seen as official or random acts of violence and—

Pastor NIKITIN. Well, we are investigating this, and we were very concerned. In lots of cases somebody was paid to just—teenagers are paying money to some people just to set those churches on fire.

We see it is also happening with, for example, in the church with one of our bishops and people who is very influential in those communities.

Mr. SMITH. Is it possible that some of those same people that are committing anti-Semitic actions are also committing these actions as well?

Pastor NIKITIN. Well, if you—if we refer to the Nazis—I believe, yes, there is a strong movement, I would say, of Nazis who is trying to put everything that is not Orthodox as a picture of—brought from outside of the country, brought from America or brought from Israel.

So I think to the big degree, the people are supporting the Nazis. They are definitely supporting the problems in the churches and in the Jewish communities.

Mr. SMITH. Do you know if any of them were part of that Russian national unity organization, that apparently has cells throughout each of the provinces that are committing these other acts of anti-Semitism?

Pastor NIKITIN. Yes.

Mr. SMITH. They are also very xenophobic.

Pastor NIKITIN. Yes. In fact, I mentioned the problems for 2 years with the church in Ekaterinberg in the Ural mountains with the Bishop Sudakoff.

That is—the unity, that is the organization who is trying to—for 2 years already to not let people to come to the church persecuting the pastor, have some connections with the local officials, writing the—in newspapers articles about sects that were sent out from the United States and from Western countries. So there is—with this practical issue in Ekaterinberg, it is definitely the case.

Mr. SMITH. Father Kishkovsky, you talked that it might take decades to overcome that totalitarian mentality that seemingly is embedded in the souls of so many people. And, obviously, a church that has been so decimated by Communism and had so many of its priests murdered, slaughtered, its churches ransacked—I remember I visited Kazan Cathedral in what was then Leningrad in 1981 and was just horrified at the desecration of that beautiful cathedral by symbols that are—that—was a museum on atheism.

Rev. KISHKOVSKY. Yes.

Mr. SMITH. And Judaism, Christianity, were all ridiculed, and young kids in their Young Pioneer scarves were walking through, guys were pointing to pictures of Christ and other pictures and just laughing. You know—I do not speak Russian, but you know what was being told was certainly in a mocking tone.

Because reform is never inevitable, is there any kind of hope that there is—if some of the messages of this totalitarianism is in an older generation, are the younger—I mean, you get some very encouraging numbers of theological schools—what was it, five to 50, 49 to 350, from '88 to now, of churches, 15 to 4,000.

There obviously will be many new shepherds out there. Is there any indication that the new generation of priests shares your view of tolerance and would reach out to Pastor Nikitin and say, “Your church is under siege. If one believer is under siege, all are under siege?”

Rev. KISHKOVSKY. I believe there are some, but they are a minority.

Mr. SMITH. Yes.

Rev. KISHKOVSKY. But along that line, half humorously, I have to tell you of a conversation with an American chaplain who was Baptist who was talking to me. He was writing a book, a dissertation, on mission in Eastern Europe. We were talking at length about the situation in Eastern Europe, and something was bothering him.

At the end of the conversation, he asked me did I think most Russian Orthodox Christians in Russia thought of Baptists as even Christians. I thought for a moment and said, “I know many who do, but they are a minority. Probably more do not think you’re a Christian at all. But, you know, the Russian Church is huge, and the vast majority do not give the matter a thought. It’s not on their radar screen.”

Then I asked him, “Do you think that most Baptists in Georgia—the State of Georgia, he was in Atlanta, I think—“think of Russian Orthodox as even Christian?” He paused with a bit of a shock and said, “That is an interesting question. Probably not.” So there is a lot to do.

But I think in Russia, specifically, I am not without optimism, but I am well aware of all of the obstacles and weight and burden of the past 70 years which have to be overcome drop by drop.

Mr. SMITH. Let me ask all of our panelists, if you could—earlier I had asked Ambassador Seiple whether or not we are in a holding pattern during these next several months. When the elections finally pan out, and Vladimir Putin, if he emerges, which I think many people think he will, as the leader with a mandate, what will happen to religious freedom?

Is it likely to deteriorate? What should we be doing to try to ensure that it does not? I mean, we do not want any law of—not any law, but any situation where we push it one way and it actually makes it worse. We never want to exacerbate it. But what should we be doing? We need to speak clearly, obviously. But linking it to foreign aid? Linking it to other diplomatic initiatives? Is that one way we might go to try to make sure religious freedom is preserved or ushered in?

Rev. KISHKOVSKY. To be honest, the foreign aid that Russia gets is minuscule. I think—

Mr. SMITH. World Bank and IMF and—

Rev. KISHKOVSKY. Okay. That is not foreign aid *per se*. Okay. Technically. I understand.

Mr. SMITH. They’ve been very reluctant to ever link it to human rights.

Rev. KISHKOVSKY. Yes. Yes, yes, yes. I think that linking that would work not in any blatant and very obvious way. I do not think it would work. But I think there should be some understanding that this network of relationships is a network of linkages.

And what I understand Putin told Secretary Albright in that three-hour conversation seems to indicate that his policy is one of defending Russia's national interests, which is understandable, but doing it in the context of engagement that is constructive with the West.

Can we predict anything about what happens after March in Russia? Probably not. I think Putin is, after all, quite unknown to us, and even to most Russians. He does seem to be a pragmatist, and hopefully the pragmatic calculation will strengthen also the principle of liberty and religious liberty as well.

One thing I note, though, in the Western body politic is this: there is probably a little bit of overkill on Putin as KGB man. Obviously, he was. Therefore, there is a mindset and we need to be aware of that. But it is not as if we should forget where Yeltsin came from, he was a Communist; where Primakov came from, he was head of the KGB; where, finally, Shevardnadze came from, he was part of the security services of the Soviet Union.

All of them came from somewhere and often from places that are not so pretty. The main issue, I suppose, is where, realistically, is a political leader headed. I hope that we still have hope that Putin might, in the end, create—help create a situation which will be constructive rather than negative.

Mr. SMITH. Pastor Nikitin?

Pastor NIKITIN. I would say that a very important moment in what—we had to continue on to do the actions that you, Mr. Chairman, achieved and we see the results, the great results, because I see the Russian politicians are still looking at the relationship—personal relationship with U.S. Congressmen.

So I am meeting with lots of Congress members, and I am sharing my faith, doing it in a very gentle way. But I see the very openness of Duma members toward the faith.

And definitely lots of them are trying to do—trying to find a way how to be better—how to be more effective for their own nation. So that is the way of personal relationship. I think it is very important. We can see what has been achieved.

Also, concerning Putin—I would say it is not right now the Mr. Putin so much influence in the politics even now, but people are surrounded—who surrounded him and were called Yeltsin's family, and there is definitely—we see the certain appeals for religious ideology being made.

So we are very concerned about the time after the elections, and we definitely believe that there is a need to—help toward understanding of the human rights and religious freedom.

One of the things that I believe very important is to bring to the local levels of authorities understanding of the human rights and understanding of the declarations, what we sign, what the Russians sign, what the—at OSCE meetings and the Helsinki—since Helsinki.

So I believe that a very important part what needs to be done, it is teaching—bringing more information to the local levels. So it is—the meetings like happened in St. Petersburg, it is bringing a whole new perspective of the relationship and new perspective of religion freedom. So—

Prof. KRASIKOV. If I could say something with the help of my friend, Pastor Nikitin, I have known for a long time. But I shall speak Russian to be more exact.

Mr. SMITH. Okay. It might be helpful.

Prof. KRASIKOV. (Translated by Pastor Nikitin) As a journalist, I was present during a number of different meetings of the Helsinki process in the 1970s. I remember how some members of the Soviet delegation tried to convince the political leadership to sign agreements concerning human rights in exchange for cooperation with other agreements, especially in the sphere of the general principles of the coexistence between the East and the West.

Objectively it was the means to dismantle peacefully the totalitarian regime with the support of international public opinion. In fact, after these agreements were signed by the leadership, it became incumbent upon them to fulfill their obligation to uphold human rights including religious liberty.

This practice, in my mind, would be a good one to continue at the international level because there are still, many years later, people who are against freedom in general and against religious freedom in particular.

It will be much easier for those who are for liberty and freedom of religion if a cooperative effort is made to carry out new agreements concerning freedom of religion. Our connections will continue to grow deeper and there will be many lines of communication.

Mr. SMITH. Let me ask you one final question, and then if you have any further questions or comments you would like to make. This is related. A couple of weeks ago I met with Wei Jingsheng, the leading democracy activist from China, who spent years in Laogai and in Chinese prisons for his faith in human rights, in trying to promote a new China.

He said that the bombings that occurred in Belgrade that hit the Chinese Embassy had, however unwittingly—that action had tilted the politics in Beijing so that Zheng Zheming and Li Peng and other leaders in China were able to just squeeze out the so-called moderates within that country, and that the hardliners were in ascendancy more than they were before. That anyone who talked or even showed any sign of human rights tolerance was seen as someone that was in the back of the bus, if not off the bus.

Secondly, I detected when we were in St. Petersburg a profound—and, in fact, for the record, I was very much against that bombing. I thought it was wrong morally. I thought it was a wrong tactic to use. You know, “Sign, Rambouillet, or else we bomb.” And I think it set up a very bad precedent. There was no corresponding plan to protect the Kosovo Albanians. If we attack in Serbia, what happens to the people we are purporting to protect?

But that being what it may, there was collateral damage, I think, in Russia—very severe collateral damage, and perhaps it has muted our voice when we speak of human rights.

And my question is: especially on Chechnya, you know, there seems to—I mean, Chernomyrdin tried to broker some kind of peace, tried to get the bombing to stop. We paid no attention whatsoever to them. Now we are saying, “Stop Chechnya.”

It would seem that, you know, we—people can become tone deaf when we speak of human rights and they say, “Hey, look what you just did.” And whether it was right or wrong—I happen to think it

was wrong. Reasonable people perhaps think it was right. It's had a collateral damage in China, one big superpower. It has had a corresponding collateral damage, and a very negative one, in Russia.

How has, in your views, the bombing in Serbia impacted on our voice—moral voice—to speak out on human rights in Russia?

Rev. KISHKOVSKY. In my opinion, the high-profile quality of this very difficult issue is gone in Russia. But what's worse is that there's an undercurrent. Namely, there is a sort of moral assumption that there is a moral equivalence between what was being done by NATO in Serbia and Kosovo, and what the Russian Federal Forces are doing in Chechnya.

I was in Belgrade twice in May last year. I was with the Jesse Jackson and Joan Campbell-led group, and I was one of the five that met with Milosevic to try to secure the release of our three servicemen.

And at the end of May I went again with three others—a Russian Orthodox bishop and two Protestant leaders from Western Europe. Again, we saw Milosevic, and again—and we saw Chernomyrdin when he arrived in Belgrade on his final round of his mission and were able to tell him our impressions of Milosevic's attitude.

My point is, though, that there were—especially religious communities that were doing their best to keep some communication going, some channels of communication open, at what was a very dangerous time for the future of relationships.

And to some small degree, perhaps we succeeded. But in many ways we did not. The impact is poisonous in Russia, because, as I say, it is a kind of assumption now. It's not a high-level, high-profile issue, as far as I can see, in the media or even in political campaigns per se.

But an undercurrent of public attitude, which is certainly used by spokesmen for the government and for the military is that, hey, there is an equivalence. Even if—if anything, NATO was acting against a sovereign state, whereas Russia is acting within the sovereign borders of the Russian Federation. We have to be sensitive to that.

And if I may, Mr. Chairman, add one other kind of collateral issue. I am an American since age eight. I came as a refugee—a boy with a refugee family from war-torn Europe. We had fled from Poland to the West in front of the military activity between the Germans and the Soviets, trying to get to the Western allies as best we could.

The point is that—that the collateral damage that occurs—we go into a place like Russia with all sincerity believing that what we carry, which is the principle of religious liberty, the principle of communication between communities, is the only thing that is carried into that land from our land, from America.

And we often forget that the more high-profiled items that come to Russia from the West and from America are actually not about religious liberty. They are about the very poor and violent programming on television. They are about all kinds of corrupt practices, which—many of which come there from here.

Those things are more visible to the average Russian than our espousal of the principles of religious liberty. Those things, of course, are the things that most of us—all of us probably are against within our own society.

But we need to go into a country like Russia knowing that also is an issue there, and that they need to know that there are many of us here who are very critical of those aspects of American society. That

they have allies on those issues here, and that those allies are also strong proponents of religious liberty. Then, I think a more vital connection can be made.

Mr. SMITH. Thank you. Excellent points.

Pastor NIKITIN. I was in the Duma when that accident with China's Embassy happened, and I was very—I was disappointed what kind of feelings Russian Duma members had. They were so excited that they would like—they were screaming about the war and so on and so forth.

Russian politicians are very excited and enthusiastic people. I think that accident brought a lot of damage to the principles of liberty and freedom of religion.

But at the same time, most of the Russians view the war in Chechnya as a war with terrorists, with mafia, and a war with the bandits. So there is a public opinion about this war, and and a public opinion definitely to finish the war.

But in lots of ways I can see that any opinion against this war is bringing forth as a pro-American activity. So, and the bringing forth the—to the extreme excitement of nationalistic people. I have to—lots of things to say about it, but I am—I just do not want to take your time.

Mr. SMITH. Thank you.

Prof. KRASIKOV [Translated by Pastor Nikitin]. Religious and ethnic factors are often ignored by politicians. A number of analysts suggest that, with the collapse of the USSR and an end to military-political and ideological opposition between the West and the East, the human race would enter a period of constant change toward peaceful growth under the conditions of globalization. These analysts' suppositions have not proven true to fact. The world has not been able to avoid the reality of violence and war, which shake the earth on the eve between the second and third millennia just like it has shaken the earth throughout the history of mankind

In the year 2000, we began with a conflict of utmost difficulty in Chechnya, the roots of which also extend back to the past, before the twentieth century, the aftereffect of which will, undoubtedly, be felt for a very long time in this new millennium. The religious nature of the present war in Chechnya is rejected by leaders of the Russian Orthodox Church and Muslims leaders, as well as by Russian and world politics. Indeed, the immediate reasons for the conflict lie not in the sphere of religion, but in completely different spheres: political, economic, social and even criminal.

It is obvious that there is also a political factor, both from the Chechen side where there is an ongoing battle for power between the separate clans of the local elite. Similarly, such a factor exists from the Russian standpoint, on which different reversals of fortune of the Chechen drama have exercised a direct influence, especially in pre-election situations.

Alas, understanding of truisms often come quite late for politicians. Answering questions for journalists at a press conference at the House of Representatives of Russia in early June 1999, then Prime Minister of Russia Sergei Stepashin made an admission true-to-character: *"If I better knew the Koran, I would have made a better decision concerning the Northern Caucasus."* *"I could have gone through that experiences and changed many things for the better had I known the intricacies of religion."*

Sergei Stepashin comments were in regard to the first war in Chechnya, which took place from 1994-1996. He played an active role in the decision making process in that war in the capacity of Minister of the Interior. At that time, of course, he did not know that not long after he made that comment, a second war in the Northern Caucasus would begin, only on an even larger scale.

Of course, war including the use of aviation, artillery, and missiles is not the method to be used in conquering terrorism. War can easily be used as a means to encourage and even provoke nationalist sentiments. We witnessed this in Yugoslavia and then again in Russia.

It does not follow that medicine taken to alleviate a sickness should be more harmful than the sickness itself. The regular standing army should not be the force of choice in the battle against terrorism. Instead, small units which specialize in anti-terrorist activities should be used. In my opinion, in the area of anti-terrorist units, cooperative mutual training exercises between many countries can be quite successful, the United States and Russia included. This would be an example of true cooperation for the sake of the world and for the protection of human rights, including religious freedom.

Mr. SMITH. Would any of you like to conclude? Any further comments?

I want to thank our very distinguished witnesses. You know, you were invited here simply because we so value your opinion, we respect you, and know that you would provide us with valued insights of—this is an 18-member Commission, 18 members of the House and Senate, and then three members of the executive branch.

I just want to note for the record that Ambassador Seiple's specialist, Nancy Hewlitt, has stayed on to hear as well. This record will be disseminated, first, to the Commissioners, but also to the members of Congress and to our leadership, the Republican and Democrat leadership.

So hopefully it will become a very valuable tool in understanding the dimensions of this issue. And, again, we are very grateful for your input. It helps us to do our job better, to keep us from stumbling, and from making mistakes which we might otherwise make. So I do thank you.

Anything further now or into the future you'd like to provide us with—insights, guidance—please do. We are a very activist Commission. We do respond quickly with letters, phone calls, and site visits to Moscow, St. Petersburg, or anywhere else where we need to go. So I do thank you and look forward to continued, in the future, from benefitting from your insights.

Rev. KISHKOVSKY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Prof. KRASIKOV. Thank you.

Mr. SMITH. The hearing is adjourned.

(Whereupon, the hearing was concluded at 5:08 p.m.)

**PREPARED STATEMENT OF
HON. BEN NIGHTHORSE CAMPBELL, CO-CHAIRMAN**

Mr. Chairman, while I appreciate the fact that today's hearing was scheduled to take advantage of the availability of several of the expert witnesses, unfortunately I am in Colorado for a series of town meetings at this time when the United States Senate is not in session and thus unable to join you.

At the outset I wish to pay tribute to the courageous men and women who persevered decades of personal hardship, persecution and even imprisonment during the Soviet period because of their profession and practice of their religion or belief. Their abiding faith serves as an inspiring legacy that lives on nearly a decade after the fall of Communism and official atheism in Russia.

In the ensuing years religious liberty flourished in Russia as Moscow implemented its related Helsinki commitments, particularly the provisions of the 1989 Vienna Concluding Document. Relatively liberal laws were enacted in the early 1990s to protect the rights of all Russians to pursue their faith. Churches and seminaries forcibly closed were reopened and foreign missionaries operated freely.

The past several years have witnessed a shift in this tolerant attitude towards religious freedom. Cumbersome and discriminatory registration requirements have been instituted since the Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations came into force in late 1997. Implementation of the law has varied widely from one region to another with many provisions remaining ambiguous and subject to varying interpretations.

As a result, a cloud of uncertainty hangs over many religious communities in Russia today, particularly those deemed to be "non-traditional." Thus we witness the proliferation of church planting in certain regions on the one hand, and the denial of access to places for worship on the other. The current confusing and contradictory environment could also provide fertile ground for corruption by unscrupulous bureaucrats charged with implementing the 1997 law. I am interested in hearing from the witnesses their thoughts on whether the Russian Federation should be encouraged to scrap the existing intrusive registration process for an information-based system that allows the Russian people to freely profess and practice their faith without discrimination.

I look forward to reviewing the testimony presented at today's hearing as we seek to promote the core OSCE values of democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

Thank you Mr. Chairman.

PREPARED STATEMENT OF HON. BOB CLEMENT

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for your hard work on human rights and religious freedom. Thank you, Ambassador Seiple, for your work. It is a great pleasure to have you here. As you know, I was a co-author of the International Religious Freedom Act, and it is great to have you here implementing the law we worked so hard on, together with Mr. Smith. You have done some great work as Ambassador for Religious Freedom, and wish you the best as you continue. Thank you also to each of the witnesses, for your work to protect religious freedom in Russia.

Like the rest of you, I spent a lot of time working against passage of the 1997 Russian law. I helped lead an appeal against the restrictions to President Yeltsin, and also worked with Vice-president Gore prior to his visit to Moscow, where he raised the problem. As we all know, the law did pass. I am glad it has not yet served to restrict religious freedom in some of the ways we feared.

However, I am quite concerned about the number of incidents that may be related to this law, including many registration problems. I am also concerned about such cases as the judge who was recently removed from her position because she is a member of a Pentecostal church, and the misuse of laws that resulted in an American Baptist missionary's expulsion from Russia. There are many such disturbing incidents, and I thank all of you who are here to address some of these issues. It is my hope that Russia's new leadership will take a strong stand for religious freedom. I do want to thank the State Department and the Helsinki Commission for the vigilance they have shown. That vigilance has made a critical difference in holding off some of the worst effects of the law. Thank you all.

WRITTEN SUBMISSION OF AMBASSADOR ROBERT SEIPLE**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE
ANNUAL REPORT ON INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM
FOR 1999: RUSSIA****SECTION I. FREEDOM OF RELIGION**

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice; however, although the Constitution also provides for the equality of all religions before the law and the separation of church and state, in practice the Government does not always respect the provision for equality of religions.

In December 1990, the Soviet Government adopted a law on religious freedom designed to put all religions on an equal basis. (After the breakup of the Soviet Union, this law became part of the Russian Federation's legal code.) The 1990 law forbade government interference in religion and established simple registration procedures for religious groups. Registration of religious groups was not required, however, by registering groups obtained a number of advantages, for example, the ability to establish official places of worship or benefit from tax exemptions.

There are no reliable statistics that break down the country's population by denomination, but available information suggests that approximately half of all citizens consider themselves Russian Orthodox Christians (although the vast majority of these persons are not regular churchgoers). An opinion poll of 1,500 respondents conducted by Public Opinion in April 1999 found that 55 percent of the population consider themselves Orthodox Christian, 9 percent are followers of another religion, and 31 percent say that they are atheists. Another poll of some 4,000 respondents by the Center of Sociological Studies at Moscow State University in the spring of 1999 found that 43 percent claimed to be Orthodox Christians, while 51 percent described themselves as "religious believers" (not necessarily Orthodox). A separate poll found that in Moscow only 20 percent of respondents who identify themselves as Orthodox are regular churchgoers, while in the regions only 7 percent attend church regularly. Also, January 1999 Ministry of Justice figures for registered religious organizations showed that over half of registered organizations were Russian Orthodox, 18 percent were Muslim, and 20 percent were Christian organizations other than Russian Orthodox. Jewish and Buddhist registered religious organizations each accounted for slightly less than 1 percent of the total number of organizations. Jehovah's Witnesses account for 1.5 percent of the total registered religious organizations, and the group reports that it has 250,000 members in the country. Ministry of Justice figures show that approximately 5,000 "nontraditional" organizations are registered nationwide, representing a broad range of denominations and religious practices. Nontraditional registered organizations include Jehovah's Witnesses, Methodists, Presbyterians, Pentecostals, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, Evangelical Christian-Baptists, Roman Catholics, Hare Krishnas, Seventh-Day Adventists, Lutherans, Baha'is, and splinter groups of Russian Orthodox Christianity, as well as 227 organizations representing less well-known denominations.

During the early and mid-1990's, many sectors of society, particularly nationalists and many members of the Russian Orthodox Church, were disturbed by a sharp increase in the activities of well-financed foreign missionaries. Many advocated limiting the activities of what they termed "nontraditional" religious groups and what were sometimes called "dangerous" or "totalitarian" sects.

In October 1997, the Government enacted a new, restrictive, and potentially discriminatory law on religion, which raised questions about the Government's commitment to international agreements honoring freedom of religion. Passage of the law prompted concern in the international community, because for the first time since the breakup of the Soviet Union, the Government had adopted legislation that could abridge fundamental human rights. This law replaced the progressive 1990 religion law that had helped facilitate a revival of religious activity.

The new law ostensibly targeted so-called "totalitarian sects" or dangerous religious cults. However, the intent of some of the law's sponsors appears to have been to discriminate against members of foreign and less well-established religions by making it difficult for them to manifest their beliefs through organized religious institutions. The critics of the law believe that the basic assumption behind the law is that religious groups must prove their innocence and their legitimacy before gaining the advantages of state recognition. Russian government officials, including President Boris Yeltsin and then-Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin, pledged that the law on religion would not result in any erosion of religious freedom in the country. Officials in the Presidential Administration and the Cabinet of Ministers have echoed and clarified these commitments during 1998 and the first half of 1999. They have taken a flexible approach to implementation of some of the law's most negative aspects and have shown some willingness to intervene with local authorities in defense of religious rights.

The law is very complex, with many ambiguous and contradictory provisions. On its face, the law creates various categories of religious communities with differing levels of legal status and privileges. The law distinguishes between religious "groups" and "organizations," two mutually exclusive registration categories, and creates two categories of organizations: "regional" and "centralized." A religious group is a congregation of worshipers that does not have the legal status of a juridical person, meaning that it cannot open a bank account, own property, issue invitations to foreign guests, publish literature, or conduct worship services in prisons and state-owned hospitals, among other things. Groups are permitted to rent public spaces and hold services. Moreover, the law does not purport to abridge the rights of individual members of groups. For example, a member of a religious group could buy property for the group's use, invite personal guests to engage in religious instruction, and import religious material. However, in this case, the group would not enjoy tax benefits and other rights extended to religious organizations, such as proselytizing.

The law's most controversial provisions are those that limit the rights, activities, and status of religious groups existing in the country for less than 15 years. Groups that can prove their existence in the country for 15 years have the right to obtain the status of "local

religious organizations." Similarly, congregations that had existed for 15 years when the new law was enacted also are eligible for registration as an organization. Organizations, both local and centralized, are considered juridical persons, enjoy tax exemptions, and are permitted to proselytize, establish religious schools, host foreign religious workers, and publish literature.

Under the 1997 religion law, representative offices of foreign religious organizations are required to register with state authorities. They are barred from conducting liturgical services and other religious activity unless they have acquired the status of a group or organization. Although the law officially requires all foreign religious organizations to register, in practice foreign religious representatives' offices (those not registered under Russian law) have opened without registering or have been accredited to a registered Russian religious organization. However, these representative offices cannot carry out religious activities and do not have the status of a religious organization.

A "centralized religious organization" can be founded by a confession that has 3 functioning "local organizations" (each of which must have at least 10 members who are Russian citizens) in different regions. A centralized organization apparently has the right to establish affiliated local organizations without adhering to the 15-year rule. In implementing this provision, the Government has extended this definition to include a "registered centralized managing center." Centralized organizations also have been accorded the right to organize affiliated local organizations, which themselves do not comply with the 15-year rule.

Critics of the law have claimed that it violates the Constitution's provision of equality before the law of all confessions. In particular, many religious groups criticized the law's requirement that religious groups exist for 15 years before they can qualify for organization status. Also, many groups feared the consequences of the law's provisions limiting the actions of foreign religious missionaries. Representatives of some religions, such as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Mormons) and some Pentecostal and charismatic Christian groups, have said that their activities in the country could be halted under the law. The law furnishes regional officials with an instrument that has been interpreted and used by officials at the local level to restrict the activities of religious minorities.

Between February 12 and June 3, 1998, the Government issued three sets of regulations governing implementation of the new law. While providing procedural guidelines for registration, the regulations failed to clarify many key definitional points in the law.

In practice, the registration process--which involves simultaneous registration at both the federal and local levels--has proven for a number of confessions to be onerous and requires considerable time, effort, and legal expense. International and well-funded Russian religious organizations, in particular, began the reregistration process soon after publication of the regulations governing reregistration. Russian Pentecostal groups, which have a solid and growing network of churches throughout the country, sought guidance from the Ministry of Justice on reregistration as early as November 1997. One of the larger organizations, the Russian Unified Fellowship of Christians of the Evangelical Faith (which traces its origins back to the

early 1900's) reregistered as a centralized religious organization by late March 1998. It has since incorporated many smaller, newer Pentecostal groups within its structure.

According to Ministry of Justice figures, as of January 1999, 16,749 organizations representing over 57 confessions were registered in the country. As of April 1999, 130 organizations out of 400 had been reregistered at the federal level. As of the end of March 1999, an estimated 15,000 organizations countrywide remained to be reregistered by the end of 1999, according to the Ministry of Justice. The delay in reregistration is due in part to the slow pace at which the Federal Ministry of Justice has disseminated the regulations and guidelines to local authorities and to understaffing both at the Ministry of Justice and at local levels. In many instances the Ministry of Justice has asked for additional information and has demanded changes in the organizational structure and by-laws of some groups to ensure that they are in conformance with the law. Also, smaller minority confessions sometimes feared the registration process, while others started the process late because they needed to agree internally on how to register their organizations in conformance with the law. Of 89 regions, 30 have laws and decrees on religion that violate the Constitution by restricting the activities of religious groups; presumably they would have to be changed. In the meantime, many local religious organizations continue to try to seek means of affiliating themselves with centralized organizations or confessions that can meet the 15-year rule and provide a protective legal cover. However, some individual local churches and religious orders, citing their theological and administrative independence, are reluctant to make themselves part of a larger organization. Under the new system, such religious communities face considerable legal disadvantages.

President Yeltsin and other high-ranking officials have stated consistently that the law would be applied in a liberal, tolerant manner, thereby preserving religious freedom and the equality of confessions. They insist that no mainstream religion already operating in the country would see its activities curtailed as a result of the new law. The full effect of the law on minority confessions or religions considered nontraditional is not expected to be clear until after December 31, 1999 (the deadline before which organizations registered under the old law are required to obtain new registration). To date no religious organization has ceased operations as a result of the law. Presidential administration officials have established consultative mechanisms to facilitate government interaction with religious communities and to monitor application of the law on religion. However, a federal government agency in the case of at least one religion has been responsible for significant restrictions on the activities of a church. In some areas, foreign Roman Catholic religious workers must return to their home countries every 3 months in order to renew their visas, unlike other foreign workers who can apply for multiple-entry visas or extend their stays.

Despite the Federal Government's efforts to implement the law liberally and to provide assurances that religious freedom would be observed, restrictions continued at the local level. The vagueness of the law and regulations, the contradictions between federal and local law, and varying interpretations furnish regional officials with a pretext to restrict the activities of religious minorities. Discriminatory

practices at the local level are attributable to the increased decentralization of power and the relatively greater vulnerability of local governments to lobbying by majority religions, as well as to government inaction and discriminatory attitudes that are widely held in society. Concerns are mounting that a large number of religious organizations may remain unregistered by the end of 1999 and may therefore be even more vulnerable to attempts by local authorities to restrict their activities.

For example, Jehovah's Witnesses reported that local authorities were refusing to register some local Jehovah's Witness organizations pending federal level registration and the resolution of a Moscow municipal court case against the Moscow Jehovah's Witnesses under Article 14 of the 1997 religion law. Jehovah's Witnesses and religious rights activists welcomed the Ministry of Justice's April 30, 1999 decision to reregister Jehovah's Witnesses on the federal level. Federal level registration of the Jehovah's Witnesses apparently set a positive precedent for regions to follow--Jehovah's Witnesses report that about 150 of their 250 local organizations have been registered either for the first time or reregistered. One notable exception is Moscow's Directorate of Justice, which has refused three applications for unclear reasons. Although there is no legal basis to do so, the Directorate may be refusing registration pending resolution of the outstanding civil case against the Jehovah's Witnesses in Moscow. Now that the Ministry of Justice has sent guidance to the regions on registration of local religious organizations, Jehovah's Witnesses are cautiously optimistic that their 100 or so local organizations that remain to be registered can complete the process successfully. Some organizations that do not fit neatly into the registration provisions of the law are encountering trouble. For example, the Catholic religious order "Society of Jesus" (Jesuits) was denied federal level registration in April 1999 because of conflicts between the religion law's assumptions and the order's status within the Catholic Church as independent of the local bishop.

Although it can be a slow and costly process for religious groups, the judicial system has provided an appeal process for religious organizations threatened with loss of registration. Some local churches initially denied local registration have been registered following successful court battles, as in the case of the Evangelical Lutheran Mission in Khakassiya in November 1998, when the federal Supreme Court overturned the verdict of the Khakassiya Supreme Court. In February 1999, the Supreme Court of Khakassiya rejected the prosecutor general's request to nullify the registration of the Evangelical Lutheran Mission; the prosecutor plans to appeal the case. In July 1998, a local prosecutor opened a civil case against the Word of Life Pentecostal Church in the Far Eastern city of Magadan under Article 14 of the 1997 religion law, accusing the Church of using cult practices to manipulate its members. After a lengthy delay, a Magadan municipal court finally dismissed the case in May 1999 for insufficient evidence, a decision that was upheld in June 1999 by the Magadan oblast court. However, the Church fears that the same prosecutor soon may try to open a criminal case. The Church also won a court battle for reregistration in March 1999. A church member employed by the Government who was threatened with the loss of her job in late 1998 was still at her post as of June 1999. Church officials

report that two other church members were fired because of their religion, but such allegations are difficult to prove. Also, a tax investigation opened against the Church in December 1998 continues. Church members reported that negative stories about them repeatedly appeared in the local state-controlled press, with no mention of their court victories. Despite these difficulties, the Word of Life Pentecostal Church continues its normal activities.

Since 1994 30 of 89 regional governments have passed restrictive laws and decrees intended to restrict the activities of religious groups. At the time the 1997 religion law was under discussion, its proponents argued that it was necessary in order to deal with the many restrictive local laws. The Federal Government has not challenged effectively the unconstitutionality of these restrictions, although the presidential administration sent warnings to 30 regions regarding the unconstitutionality of local laws. Critics contend that the Federal Government should be more active in reversing discriminatory actions taken at the local level and, when necessary, reprimanding the officials at fault. Also according to critics, the federal authorities need to take action to ensure that regional and local legislation or other actions do not contradict constitutional provisions protecting religious freedom. There are reports that some local and municipal governments prevented religious groups from using venues, such as cinemas, suitable for large gatherings. In many areas of the country, government-owned facilities are the only available venues. As a result, in some instances denominations that do not have their own property effectively have been denied the opportunity to practice their faith in large groups. For example, in the summer of 1998, local officials in Rostov-on-the-Don cancelled a rental agreement permitting the Shield of Faith Pentecostal Church to sponsor a Jesus Festival concert in a sports complex. The chairman of the city's Department of Cossacks and Religion refused to permit the event. In September 1998, city authorities required a cinema to cancel its rental agreement with the Shield of Faith congregation. In June 1998, Canadian evangelist Viktor Hamm of the Billy Graham Evangelical Association cancelled an outdoor preaching event in Voronezh after city authorities denied the local sponsors of the event, the Evangelical Christian-Baptists, permission to hold the event. In August 1998, according to unconfirmed reports from religious press sources, authorities in Kasplya, in the Smolenski region, closed a Sunday school and prohibited worship services by the Evangelical Christian-Baptists. In September 1998, the director of the Moscow Technical College ordered guards not to admit an unregistered Baptist congregation onto the premises it had rented. The action allegedly stemmed from an intervention by the Federal Security Bureau (FSB), according to unconfirmed reports from religious press sources. According to Jehovah's Witnesses in Moscow, late in April 1999 the Moscow northern district administration gathered theater and assembly hall managers and ordered them to refuse to lease their facilities to Jehovah's Witnesses. The Open Christianity private ecumenical school was evicted from its premises in St. Petersburg in March 1999 after a protracted battle with city officials about rights to the building, registration of the school, and the school's taxes. However, it is not clear that the school's reli-

gious orientation was at the root of city administration actions against it, and local government officials tried to relocate the school to an alternative site.

Some local executive authorities continued to cite the new law or local laws to obstruct religious groups' activities or to rescind their existing local registrations. Yaroslavl officials in January 1998 refused to register the New Generation Church, previously an unregistered underground church. Local officials cited the new law as the basis for their actions. In June 1998, according to unconfirmed reports from religious press sources, local authorities in Novosibirsk denied the registration of a Mennonite congregation, although it had been registered originally in 1970. According to reports dating from October 1998, local authorities in Osa in the Perm region pressured a Pentecostal church to register, although it was not required to do so, according to the 1997 religion law, if it identified itself as a "religious group." The group had met with resistance from the local Russian Orthodox priest and the local press. In November 1998, according to the United Church, its St. Petersburg branch was denied local registration after a federal court in St. Petersburg started proceedings against the Church. According to unconfirmed reports from religious press sources, in November 1998, the regional department of justice in Khabarovsk blocked three churches (Pentecostals, Methodists, and independent Protestants) from reregistering. In March 1999, an expert council of the Primorskiy kray administration declared that the Church of Christ was "destructive." It cited the group's proselytizing of minors without parental consent and other actions it believed to lead to the breakup of families. The council's declaration was sent to the prosecutor's office, which may decide to seek the liquidation of the group under the religion law, although no further action was taken on this case as of June 30, 1999.

In June 1999, the Directorate of Justice in Chelyabinsk again rejected the local registration application of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, based on the alleged incompatibility of church activities with federal law. Even without registration, the church continued to hold regular services without incident, although its missionaries have suspended their door-to-door canvassing and other outreach activities. If the Church remains unregistered, its missionaries would be forced to leave the country when their visas expire in September 1999. The Directorate of Justice also has rejected the registration applications of the Baptist, Adventist, and Pentecostal churches in Chelyabinsk on similar grounds.

Reports of harassment and punishment for religious belief or activity continued. For example, in January and February 1998, the Khakassiya Lutheran Church, the Khakassiya Christian Center, and the Yaroslavl New Generation Church received orders from local officials to suspend production and distribution of religious videos and publications and religious education. Some members of these Churches reported being fired from their jobs, beaten, and imprisoned for their religious affiliations. In July 1998, according to unconfirmed reports from religious press sources, the mayor of Novokuznetsk in Siberia barred Gideons from distributing New Testaments in schools, although their charter, approved by the Government, states that they may do so. In August and September 1998, local authorities and agents from the FSB harassed, repeatedly in-

terrogated, and threatened with imprisonment a U.S. missionary from the Baptist Mid-Missions. FSB agents warned members of the autonomous Baptist Church affiliated with Baptist Mid-Missions to stop attending services, according to the Keston News Service. Despite legal registration, members of some religions, including some Protestant groups, Jehovah's Witnesses, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, continue to face discrimination in their ability to rent premises and conduct group activities. For example, in March 1999, local militia troops broke up services of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints in Chelyabinsk and interrogated seven missionaries. In April regional officials forbade the Church from holding services on Easter Sunday and threatened the church leader with arrest if he assembled his congregation that day. Nonetheless, the Church held its Easter Sunday services without incident. The Church applied unsuccessfully for local registration several times in Chelyabinsk, despite its registration at the federal level as a central religious organization.

Based on a complaint from the Committee to Save Youth from Totalitarian Cults (a group that reportedly has ties to the Russian Orthodox Church), a Moscow municipal procurator is seeking "liquidation" (i.e., termination of the organization as a legal entity) of the Moscow Jehovah's Witnesses organization under Article 14 of the 1997 religion law for its alleged antisocial, antifamily character. This is the first proceeding in the judicial branch that attempted to suspend the operations of an existing religious organization at the local level. In March 1999, the trial was suspended pending review of the case by a panel of court-appointed religious experts. On June 28, 1999 the Moscow city court upheld the decision of the Golovinskiy municipal court to appoint an expert panel. Jehovah's Witnesses in Moscow report that they still are being refused local registration and continue to have trouble leasing assembly space and obtaining the necessary permits to renovate their main building.

The Khakassiya and Yaroslavl cases form the basis of the constitutional challenge to the law on religion, filed with the Constitutional Court in May 1998 by the Institute for Religion and Law, a nongovernmental organization (NGO). The petition challenges the constitutionality of the law's 15-year requirement and its limitations on the rights and activities of confessions that do not meet that requirement. The Constitutional Court accepted the case for review in November 1998, but a hearing is not expected to take place before autumn 1999.

Human rights activists welcomed a March 1999 open letter to the President and Duma by Russian Federation Human Rights Plenipotentiary Oleg Mironov, in which he criticized the 1997 religion law and recommended changes to bring it into accordance with the Constitution and international norms for religious freedom. (Mironov's office is a government entity created by the Parliament in 1997 that is dedicated to investigating complaints of human rights abuses.) Human rights activists contend that only 15 percent of actual violations of religious freedom are reported. According to various sources, most citizens, especially those living in the regions, are still skeptical about the protection of religious freedom and are reluctant to assert their rights due to fear of retaliation. The Federal Government should be more active in reversing discriminatory actions taken at the local level and when necessary reprimanding the officials at fault. Along

with everyone else, federal authorities and Moscow human rights activists often have limited information about what is happening in the regions.

The Vanino Baptist Church and its pastor, American citizen Dan Pollard, since March 1998 have fought a lengthy legal battle over registration in the Far Eastern region of Khabarovsk and to obtain the necessary permits for Pollard, or his temporary replacement Arthur Bristol, to remain in the country. Khabarovsk authorities maintained that the Baptist Church did not meet the 1997 religion law's requirement of over 15 years of existence and therefore could not be a sponsoring religious organization. To facilitate reregistration of the Vanino Baptist Church under the 1997 law, the Vanino Baptist Church and its lawyer negotiated an agreement to join the Russian Baptist Union. However, the Church's U.S. donor could not agree to this arrangement due to doctrinal differences. In May 1999, Pollard was refused a visa to return to the country. Bristol left in September 1998, reportedly due to harassment, surveillance, and threats.

The Moscow general procurator and approximately 70 members of the FSB, Federal Tax Police, and local police raided two locations of the Church of Scientology in Moscow on February 25, 1999. According to church officials, they confiscated documents, including tax records and priest-penitent privileged counseling records. The raids continued over 3 days. The tax police say that they are investigating possible tax evasion and other financial irregularities. Although there were earlier press reports that two church members were beaten, U.S. Embassy officials received no confirmation of this incident.

In April 1999, the prosecutor in Stavropol expelled eight foreign citizens for spreading Islamic fundamentalism, which it labeled "Wahhabism." Most of the expellees were from Syria.

Property disputes are some of the most frequent complaints cited by religious groups. For the most part synagogues, churches, and mosques have been returned to communities to be used for religious services. The Federal Government has met the requirements of the 1993 presidential decree on communal property restitution, and the decree continues to guide the ongoing process. According to statistics from the Ministry of State Property, over 2,000 federally-owned properties have been returned to religious communities since 1989. However, jurisdiction in most cases is at the regional level, and there is no centralized source of information on these cases. One Ministry of Culture official responsible for restitution of religious historical monuments estimated in early 1999 that over 3,600 transfers of religious buildings had occurred at the regional level and that approximately 30 percent of property designated for return has been transferred back to its original owners at both the federal and regional levels. Nonetheless, there continue to be reports of religious property that has not been returned. For example, the Church of the Immaculate Conception in Ryazan still has not been returned to the local Catholic community. The Moscow Patriarchate has claimed and taken possession of properties owned by other branches of Orthodoxy and, in certain cases, property of other religions. In some property disputes, religious buildings have been "privatized," and there are long delays in finding new locations for the current occupants, as required by law. Local authorities often refuse to get involved in property disputes, which they contend are between private organizations. Even

where state or municipal authorities still have undisputed control of properties, a number of religious communities continue to meet significant obstacles when they request the return of religious buildings or when they seek to acquire land and necessary building permits for new religious structures. Since February 1999, local authorities in Omsk have not responded to the Mormons' request to lease land, although local church leaders were continuing their efforts to locate a site.

Some Protestant faiths have suggested that the Russian Orthodox Church influences the Government regarding land allocated for churches of other sects. The Jewish community, which has met with some success on communal property restitution, faces the same obstacles as other religious communities and has concerns about the return of Torah scrolls, many of which are in state museum collections.

In its preamble (which government officials insist has no legal standing), the 1997 religion law recognizes the "special contribution of Orthodoxy to the history of Russia and to the establishment and development of Russia's spirituality and culture." It accords "respect" to Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Judaism, and certain other religions as an inseparable part of the country's historical heritage. Russian Orthodoxy is considered in conservative nationalist circles as the de facto official religion of the country. Many Russians firmly believe that at least nominal adherence to the Russian Orthodox Church is at the heart of what it means to be Russian.

The Russian Orthodox Church was involved actively in drafting the 1997 law on religion. It has made special arrangements with government agencies to conduct religious education and to provide spiritual counseling to Russian military service members. These arrangements do not appear to be available to other religions. (In particular, Muslim religious leaders have complained that they are not permitted to minister to Muslim military service members.) The head of the Moscow Patriarchate, the Patriarch of Moscow and all Russia, participates in most high-level official events and appears to have direct access to and influence with officials of the executive branch. The traditional view that Russian soil is an exclusively "Orthodox domain" leads to frequent criticism and intolerance of foreign religious groups that proselytize in the country. Many Orthodox Church officials condemn such "sheep stealing" when practiced by other Christian churches. Even well-established foreign religious organizations have been characterized by the Orthodox leadership as "dangerous and destructive sects" (see Section II).

Although Jews and Muslims continue to encounter prejudice and societal discrimination (see Section II), they generally have not been inhibited by the authorities in the free practice of their religion. Other religions, including Buddhism and Shamanism, are practiced in specific localities where they are rooted in local traditions.

At two public Communist Party rallies in October 1998, Duma Deputy and retired General Albert Makashov made blatantly anti-Semitic remarks, threatening to take the Jews "to the next world." In an October 20 newspaper article he blamed the financial crisis on the country's Jews. The Duma's Communists and their allies blocked a November 4, 1998 motion to censure Makashov, and despite an outcry against Makashov in the mass media, both the Duma and the KPRF refused to censure him.

On December 15, 1998, Viktor Ilyukhin, a Communist Party Duma member and chairman of the Duma Security Committee, accused President Yeltsin of "genocide" against the Russian people, "which would not have been possible if the entourage of Yeltsin and the country's previous governments had consisted basically of members of the native peoples rather than only members of the Jewish nation." Communist Duma Deputies Makashov and Ilyukhin contributed to a climate of intolerance with their public anti-Semitic remarks. In a December 23, 1998, statement, Communist Party leader Gennadiy Zyuganov explained his party's position as "anti-Zionist," not anti-Semitic. Jewish groups believe that the Communists are using anti-Semitism as a political tool to build populist support.

President Yeltsin has spoken out repeatedly against anti-Semitic and extremist attitudes, including at the September 1998 dedication of a new memorial synagogue in Moscow. He said that it was "bitter to see that our own home-grown Fascists have emerged with their racial and national intolerance." The President's administration, the Government, and, in particular, the Russian media reacted immediately to the Communist Party's expressions of anti-Semitism. Communist Party leaders accused the press of conducting a smear campaign and threatened retribution. A December 16, 1998, presidential statement delivered to the Duma declared that "any attempt to insult ethnic groups, to limit the rights of citizens on the basis of origin, will be stopped in accordance with the Constitution and the laws of the Russian Federation." On December 30, 1998, Yeltsin ordered cabinet officials responsible for law enforcement issues to prepare a comprehensive federal program against political and religious extremism by March 1, 1999.

On February 20, 1999, during a speech to the Movement for the Support of the Army in Novocherkassk, Makashov again made anti-Semitic remarks. Following the speech, the Rostov regional prosecutor refused to take action against Makashov.

During a March 1999 meeting with a delegation from the Anti-Defamation League, then-Prime Minister Yevgeniy Primakov publicly promised strong government action and new legislation to combat anti-Semitism and extremism, including new draft legislation. Later that month the Procurator General announced that he would press a criminal case against Makashov for his repeated openly anti-Semitic public remarks. However, Makashov cannot be prosecuted unless the Duma votes to lift his parliamentary immunity. In April 1999, the Ministry of Justice concluded that the Communist Party itself did not violate the law, since the statements of its members did not reflect the objectives of the party.

The Federal Government reports that it has moved forward on its promised initiatives against extremism and anti-Semitism. In November 1998, the Duma adopted a resolution against public statements damaging to interethnic relations in the country. The Government presented to the Duma a draft law on combating political extremism and also is drafting a law on national extremism. The Duma is considering a draft law forbidding "Nazi symbols and literature." Separately, the Procurator General already sent to regional procurators instructions to cut off distribution of any literature or printed material depicting Nazi symbols, and a letter describing the Moscow city procurator's experience in combating political extrem-

ism. The Government also reports that, in implementing the presidential decree on extremism, it conducted interagency consultations that involved the presidential administration, the judiciary, law enforcement organs, and experts from outside the Government. A government review of the implementation of existing laws against acts of national, racial, and religious hatred revealed that 25 criminal investigations were conducted in 1998 and that in 1999 10 were opened by June. Also, the Moscow city дума adopted a law forbidding the distribution and display of Nazi symbols in May 1999, and the Moscow regional дума passed similar legislation in June 1999.

Another prominent public figure who regularly engaged in anti-Semitic remarks was Krasnodar region governor Nikolay Kondratenko. Because of his position, Kondratenko has a seat in the upper house of Parliament. The governor's public speeches in the region often contain crude anti-Semitic remarks and stereotypes and blame Jews and alleged Jewish conspiracies for the country's problems. For example, Kondratenko has said that the essence of Russian history is the Russian battle against Jewish domination. He has blamed "Zionists" for the war in Chechnya, for the destruction of the Communist Party, for attacks on the Russian Orthodox Church, and for introducing homosexuality in the country. In addition, there have been credible reports that Kondratenko has urged the firing of Jewish public employees in the region. In July 1998, during a tour of the North Caucasus region, Justice Minister Pavel Krashenninikov criticized Kondratenko's statements, saying that they were meant to foment ethnic strife in the area, were scaring away foreign investment, and were destabilizing the entire region.

A report issued in October 1997 by the human rights group Memorial criticized Krasnodar government officials for "encouraging radical nationalist groups," including the Cossacks, and "indirectly inciting them to violence" against ethnic minority groups in the area. Local government authorities have sanctioned patrols by Cossack paramilitary groups in the name of law enforcement. Such groups are not publicly accountable, and their activities have resulted in human rights abuses (see Section II).

After his 1996 election, Kondratenko adopted a new regional character that declares Krasnodar kray the "place of residence for the (ethnic) Russian people." He appointed Cossack "hetman" Vladimir Gromov as deputy governor of the region. In April 1997, Kondratenko and Gromov issued a resolution making Cossack groups subordinate to the regional government instead of to the State, according to the Center for Human Rights Advocacy (see Section II). The Center reported that President Yeltsin suspended this resolution in September 1997 on the grounds that it was unconstitutional.

The situation in Krasnodar drew the attention during 1998 of the Human Rights Chamber of the President's Political Consultative Council. The Chamber held hearings on the situation and demanded that federal law enforcement agencies intervene in Krasnodar and that criminal proceedings be launched against local authorities for inciting racial hatred. The extent or effectiveness of federal investigations of racial or ethnic provocations in Krasnodar is thus far unknown.

Jews continue to encounter societal discrimination, and government authorities have been criticized for insufficient action to counter it (see Section II).

On February 3, 1999, Chechen president Aslan Maskhadov declared Shari'a (Islamic law) to be in effect in the republic of Chechnya. Maskhadov signed several decrees stipulating that all local legislation be brought into line with the Koran and Shari'a regulations. Maskhadov ordered the Chechen legislature and the Council of Muf-tis to draft a Shari'a constitution within 1 month's time. The legisla-ture also was stripped of its legislative functions and on February 10, 1999 was replaced with a 34-member Shura that has responsibility for "consulting" with the republic's president. The Shura includes several prominent opposition leaders. According to one expert, the Shura created in Chechnya is not a traditional Muslim Shura run by religious men, but instead is a council of military men.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and the local authorities continued to restrict the rights of some religious minorities in some regions.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners.

There were no reports of the forced religious conversion of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the Government's refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

SECTION II. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

There is no large-scale movement to promote interfaith dialog, al-though on the local level different religious groups successfully col-laborate on charity projects and participate in interfaith dialog. Not only the Russian Orthodox Church, but also Russian Pentecostal and Baptist organizations have been reluctant to support ecumenism. Traditionally, the Russian Orthodox Church has pursued interfaith dialog with other Christians on the international level.

Muslims, who constitute approximately 10 percent of the popula-tion, continue to encounter societal discrimination and antagonism in some areas where they are a minority.

There were many instances of violence in the North Caucasus, some of which had religious motivations. The threat of hostage-taking is extremely high in the North Caucasus. The motivation is primarily economic (ransom). For example, the Keston News Service reported that in April 1999 Abuzar Sumbulatov, a leading religious affairs of-ficial in Chechnya, was kidnaped from his home in Groznyy. No ran-som was demanded and Sumbulatov is presumed dead. The reasons for the kidnaping are unknown but Sumbulatov, a Muslim, was known for promoting religious tolerance. Sumbulatov criticized the Govern-ment in Moscow for attacking the Chechen cultural heritage by de-stroying university archives but also accused former Chechen presi-dent Jokhar Dudayev's government of deliberately allowing attacks on Chechnya's ethnic Russians. Sumbulatov's abduction followed several kidnapings of Russian Orthodox and Baptist clergy in Chech-nya and bordering areas in 1998 and 1999 which, according to Keston, suggest that Christians are being targeted specifically. One kidnaped Baptist pastor later was found beheaded in March 1999, and another is feared dead. A youth leader of the Central Baptist Church in Vladikavkaz in North Ossetia was also kidnaped in March 1999. The Russian Baptist Union advised its members in 1998 to leave Chech-nya. Three Russian Orthodox priests also were kidnaped in March

1999, two in Chechnya and one in Ingushetiya, and one later was released. A U.S. missionary was kidnaped in Dagestan in November 1998 and was released by his abductors in June 1999, after being tortured in order to extort ransom.

Following large-scale emigration over the last two decades, between 600,000 and 700,000 Jews remain in the country (0.5 percent of the total population). While Jewish emigration rates are significantly lower than in the Soviet period, the number of Jews emigrating to Israel for economic reasons as well as fear of persecution increased approximately 70 percent from January 1998 to January 1999. The vast majority of Jews--80 percent--live in Moscow or St. Petersburg. Jews continue to encounter societal discrimination, and government authorities have been criticized for insufficient action to counter it. There were several reports of major crimes or acts of intimidation linked to anti-Semitic groups or motives during 1998 and the first half of 1999. For example, a large bomb exploded at the Marina Roshcha Synagogue in Moscow on May 13, 1998, injuring several construction workers at an adjoining construction site but no congregants. A previously unknown anti-Semitic organization claimed responsibility by providing television broadcasters with a videotape. Later allegations surfaced that the videotape had been faked. The attack was criticized by President Yeltsin, Moscow Mayor Yuriy Luzhkov, the Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church, and other national leaders. The city of Moscow offered to pay for repairs to the synagogue. However, as of June 30, 1999, no arrests had been made in the case. In another incident, 149 graves were desecrated at a Jewish cemetery in Irkutsk in May 1998. Swastikas were painted on the graves. The interior of the Jewish synagogue in Novosibirsk was ransacked and largely destroyed by vandals in March 1999. The vandals painted graffiti, including the swastika-like symbols and initials of the ultranationalist Russian National Unity (RNE) organization, on the interior walls of the synagogue. It was not clear whether RNE was responsible for the incident. Officials from neither the city nor regional government spoke out against the attack and no arrests were made in the case. In May 1999, a synagogue in Birobidzhan (the Jewish autonomous region) reportedly was vandalized by hooligans on two occasions. Also on May 1, 1999, two bombs exploded simultaneously near the Marina Roshcha Synagogue and the Moscow Choral Synagogue in Moscow. Federal authorities are unsure whether the attacks were motivated by anti-Semitism, but Jewish leaders are convinced that they were. Interior Minister Sergei Stepashin announced the next day that the Ministry had formed a joint team with the FSB to investigate the two bombings. No progress was reported in investigations of several incidents that occurred in 1996. Until recently there was little evidence to suggest that increased anti-Semitic rhetoric has led to increased violence, but observers in the country and abroad are watching closely to see if these most recent events are part of a pattern of intensified anti-Semitism.

The ultranationalist and anti-Semitic Russian National Unity paramilitary organization, led by Aleksandr Barkashov, appeared to extend its presence beyond its southern Russian stronghold during 1998. Although reliable figures on its membership are not available, the RNE claims a membership of 50,000 in 24 federation chapters. According to various pollsters, the radical movement appears to have

won some degree of national name recognition and may enjoy the support of up to 3 percent of the population. RNE "uniformed" members were increasingly visible during 1998 at political and cultural public gatherings, but their day-to-day visibility on the streets and in public areas of Moscow had not been as obvious. However, on January 31, 1999, approximately 150 RNE members marched in Moscow in protest of Mayor Luzhkov's ban on holding an RNE congress in Moscow in December 1998. The march received a great deal of media coverage. In Borovichi the RNE and another local Fascist group, Myortvaya Voda, were active according to local Jewish leaders, and desecrated Jewish graves, mailed death threats to Jews, and hung anti-Semitic posters. The local Borovichi дума passed a decree in December 1998 prohibiting RNE activities and the distribution of its propaganda, and in March 1999 city and law enforcement officials formed a commission to counteract the RNE's activities and propaganda. In April 1999, officials from the Borovichi city administration invited the Harold Light Center, a Jewish NGO, to present a 2-day seminar on combating anti-Semitism and extremism.

The increased visibility of the RNE and other extremists across the country prompted government efforts to address the problem of extremism more forcefully. Moscow authorities banned the RNE from convening a congress in December 1998, citing the RNE's lack of credentials as a legally registered public organization at the time. (The Ministry of Justice twice had denied the RNE's registration.) The RNE subsequently managed to register but was then stripped of its registration by a Moscow court in April 1999. However, some observers called the municipal prosecutor's case weak and motivated only by the desire of city authorities to ban the organization.

Anti-Semitic themes continued to figure prominently in hundreds of extremist publications, and some politicians made anti-Semitic remarks. Jewish groups believe that the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (KPRF) uses anti-Semitism as a political tool to build populist support. In October and December 1998, KPRF Duma members Makashov, Ilyukhin, and Zyuganov made anti-Semitic remarks, blamed the country's Jews for the economic crisis, called for quotas limiting the number of Jews in public office, and claimed that President Yeltsin's entourage is made up only of members of the "Jewish nation." Communist Duma members blocked a November 4, 1998 Duma motion to censure anti-Semitic remarks (also see Section I). Some Russian Jews believe that these public statements may have contributed to increased societal anti-Semitism.

Another prominent public figure who regularly engaged in anti-Semitic remarks was Krasnodar region governor Nikolay Kondratenko (see Section I). A report issued in October 1997 by the human rights group Memorial criticized Krasnodar government officials for "encouraging radical nationalist groups," including the Cossacks, and "indirectly inciting them to violence" against ethnic minority groups in the area. Local government authorities have sanctioned patrols by Cossack paramilitary groups in the name of law enforcement. Such groups are not publicly accountable, and their activities have resulted in human rights abuses. For example, in July 1998 Cossacks detained and whipped an Adventist distributing Bibles in a public park in Anapa in the Krasnodar region. The Cossacks refused to return the 60 Bibles

that they had confiscated from him. In May 1999, Cossacks in Anapa also beat a man connected with a Catholic church in their efforts to stop construction of a new Catholic chapel. The man was hospitalized as a result of the beating. A local priest had received a threatening letter signed by the leader of a local Cossack organization demanding that construction of the chapel cease. The Church had all the necessary permits from local authorities to build the chapel.

After his 1996 election, Kondratenko appointed Cossack "hetman" Vladimir Gromov as deputy governor of the region. In April 1997, Kondratenko and Gromov issued a resolution making Cossack groups subordinate to the regional government instead of to the State, according to the Center for Human Rights Advocacy. According to the statements of the radical Cossack chieftain Ivan Bezguly, reported in the media, he has 44,000 Cossacks at his disposal ostensibly to enforce law and order. Estimates of the total number of Cossacks in Krasnodar are as high as 300,000. The Cossacks' tactics appear designed to brutalize and intimidate the area's ethnic minorities and to bring about the group's stated goal of cleansing the area of all nonslavic Russians.

In December 1998, the Ministry of Justice launched an investigation into the reported distribution of anti-Semitic leaflets in Krasnodar that called on the population to destroy the homes of Jews. The extent or effectiveness of federal investigations of racial or ethnic provocations in Krasnodar is thus far unknown.

Despite legal registration, members of some religions, including some Protestant groups, Jehovah's Witnesses, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, continued to face discrimination in their ability to rent premises and conduct group activities (see Section I).

In February 1999, Russian Orthodox Patriarch Aleksii II called for the continuation of the struggle against foreign religions, which he believed were threatening the spiritual health of the nation. In March 1999, the Moscow Patriarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church went on record that it considers the Church of Scientology to be a dangerous sect that can have a negative impact on individuals and families. A spokesman for the Patriarchate said that it wanted the activities of the Church of Scientology to be scrutinized by the appropriate legal entities. These comments came immediately after Moscow police raided the offices of the Church of Scientology (see Section I). In February 1999, Russian Orthodox Metropolitan Kirill of Smolensk and Kaliningrad criticized Jehovah's Witnesses for their practice of proselytizing and accused the group of resorting to manipulation and psychological pressure. Metropolitan Kirill's comments came during the course of the civil trial against Jehovah's Witnesses in Moscow (see Section I).

Occasionally, opposition to the dissemination of information came from religious groups. From time to time, the Russian Orthodox Church has criticized the press for what it called "anti-church publications," but stopped short of imposing any church sanctions against particular authors or editors. However, the Church appealed to authors of what it considered inaccurate accounts of church history to "realize the sinfulness of their evil deeds." Religious groups frequently complain of discriminatory stories in local press. While the scope of the problem is difficult to gauge, newspapers have published sensational or biased articles criticizing nontraditional religions. Accord-

ing to official government sources, in Yekaterinburg early in May 1998, Bishop Nikon of the Russian Orthodox Church issued an oral order to burn books by murdered Archpriest Aleksandr Men. The Bishop reportedly admitted that he ordered the "heretical" books to be destroyed in an attempt to protect the Church from free interpretations of the teachings of Jesus Christ. However, at least one Western diplomat in Yekaterinburg is convinced the incident never took place.

In June 1998, under pressure from the local Russian Orthodox Church and the regional administration in Sakhalin, Korean Presbyterian missionaries canceled a conference that was to bring together more than 100 Presbyterian and other Protestant missionaries from around the former Soviet Union. In August 1998, Russian Orthodox Priest Martiri Bagin was suspended from his duties for criticizing the 1997 religion law and for "having dealings with foreigners and other denominations." Another press account reported that Bagin was removed for disobedience and unsanctioned appropriation of real estate and noted that the "secretive" manner in which the Patriarchate handled the case led Bagin's supporters to say that the incident was a clampdown on dissent.

As foreign or so-called "nontraditional" religions in the country continue to grow, many Russians continue to feel hostility toward these "foreign sects," perhaps influenced by negative reports in the mass media and public criticism by Russian Orthodox Church officials and other influential figures. These sentiments appear to have sparked occasional harassment and even physical attacks. For example, in February 1999 Murmansk residents protested the construction of a mosque with a prominent minaret at a highly visible site. In Altay in March 1999, leaders of local organizations signed a petition protesting the construction of a Roman Catholic cathedral on Lake Teletskoye and accusing Catholic missionaries of engaging in brainwashing. The head of the Altay republican government has pledged to prevent the construction of a Catholic church in the region. In April 1999, in Chernyakhovsk in the Kaliningrad region, an Adventist pastor and his wife filed a criminal complaint against the sons of an influential Orthodox priest after the sons disrupted an Adventist meeting, beat the pastor's wife, and ripped her clothing in March 1999. However, the case was not investigated due to lack of evidence. Mormons and Pentecostals have reported instances in which they may have been followed, harassed and, in at least one case, physically struck. There are believed to be more cases of such harassment than are reported.

SECTION III. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Mission has been extremely active in promoting international religious freedom. The U.S. Embassy in Moscow and the U.S. Consulates General in Yekaterinburg, St. Petersburg, and Vladivostok have been active throughout the period covered by this report in investigating reports of violations of religious freedom, including anti-Semitic incidents. Working level U.S. Government officials engage a broad range of Russian officials, representatives of religious groups, and human rights activists on a daily basis. These contacts include: representatives of over 20 religious confessions; the Institute for Religion and Law; lawyers representing religious groups; journalists; academics; former and current Russian government officials; and

mainstream human rights activists long known for their commitment to religious freedom, such as Moscow Helsinki Group Chairman Lyudmila Alekseyeva, Father Gleb Yakunin, and Duma Deputy Valeriy Borshchev. In two more notable examples, an embassy observer was present every day during the Moscow municipal court trial of Jehovah's Witnesses in 1999, and a State Department officer traveled to the Russian far east city of Magadan to investigate allegations of religious persecution of Pentecostals (see Section I). The Embassy's political section uses a team approach to track religious issues, which involves the human rights officer, the rule of law officer, and the civil society officer (whose duties include religious affairs). This strategy allows the Embassy to offer a broad range of reporting and to provide continuous coverage even if one of the officers is absent. The Embassy's consular section, officers from the Agency for International Development, and representatives of the Immigration and Naturalization Service regularly cooperate with the political section to gather information on religious freedom in the country. U.S. embassy personnel travelling to the regions are encouraged to inquire into the local religious freedom situation.

Embassy officials at the chief of mission level discuss religious freedom with high-ranking officials in the presidential administration, Government, and Ministry of Foreign Affairs approximately every 6 weeks, raising specific cases of concern. Russian federal officials have responded by investigating and keeping embassy staff informed on issues they have raised. Immediately after the May 1998 Marina Roshcha Synagogue bombing, the Ambassador publicly criticized the act and visited the site. The Secretary of State criticized increased anti-Semitic rhetoric and discrimination against religious groups in her January 1999 speech to Moscow civic activists.

The Embassy and consulates also approach local officials at the working level on individual religious freedom cases. As implementation of the 1997 religion law continues, the Embassy maintains semi-weekly contact with working level officials at the Ministry of Justice. Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom Robert Seiple came to Russia in April 1999 and met with key Russian officials, religious groups, and human rights activists, a visit that underscored for Russians the high importance the U.S. Government continues to place on religious freedom.

In Washington as well as in Russia, the U.S. Government presses for adherence to international standards of religious liberty in the Russian Federation. Officials in the State Department regularly meet with human rights groups and religious organizations concerned about tolerance in Russia. The 1997 law on religious freedom has been the subject of numerous high-level communications between members of the executive branch of the U.S. Government and the Russian Government, involving the President, the Vice President, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, and other senior U.S. officials. On November 24, 1998, Ambassador at Large Stephen Sestanovich, Special Advisor to the Secretary for the New Independent States, co-chaired a roundtable meeting with representatives of religious communities at the State Department together with Senator Gordon Smith, Ambassador Robert Seiple, and National Security Council Senior Director Carlos Pascual, which helped refine the policy that successfully urged the Russian Government in April 1999 to reregister Jehovah's

Witnesses as a central religious organization. Ambassador Sestanovich had also chaired roundtables on religious freedom in Russia on February 24, 1998 and May 1, 1998. On January 21, 1999, Secretary Albright met with leaders of American Jewish organizations to discuss anti-Semitism in Russia and to outline how the U.S. Government works with the Russian Government to combat this problem. On March 18, 1999, Ambassador Sestanovich co-chaired another roundtable discussion on religious freedom in Russia, this time at the U.S. Congress with the participation of Senators Orrin Hatch and Gordon Smith, to seek out the views of NGO's on how best to promote tolerance in Russia. On April 14, 1999, in compliance with Section 572 of the FY 1999 Foreign Operations Act, the Secretary made a determination that the central authorities in Russia did not implement the law on religion in a manner intended to restrict the religious liberty of minority faiths. However, in the report that accompanied the Secretary's determination to the Congress, the Secretary noted that some local officials have used the 1997 law to restrict citizens' rights.

**QUESTIONS ANSWERED FOR THE RECORD
BY AMBASSADOR ROBERT SEIPLE**

Mr. CLEMENT. But I was going to ask you about this other case about the judge who was recently removed from her position because she is a member of a Pentecostal church. Can you expand on that?

Amb. SEIPLE. We were quite concerned to read reports of this case, *Pitkevich versus the Russian Federation*, which concerns the judge who was removed for her beliefs and to which I assume you are referring. The Russians have until April 3rd to reply to questions from the European Court of Human rights in Strasbourg about this case. Keston News Service in a Wednesday 16 February story entitled "Russia to respond to religious liberty case at European Court of Human Rights" reports in some detail on these events. Embassy Moscow confirms that the story in the Keston news service is consistent with what Embassy officials are hearing from their sources. We will continue to follow this case closely.

Mr. SMITH. Could you comment, if you would, on the Russian national unity? Are they analogous to the Hitler Youth? I mean, it would appear, based on what I've read from other sources and then again what is actually contained within this book (*Union of Councils for Soviet Jews, Antisemitism, Xenophobia and Religious Persecution in Russia's Regions*) that we're talking about an organization of young people that could be the harbinger of very, very grave actions in the not-too-distant future.

Amb. SEIPLE. We are deeply troubled by anti-Semitic incidents in Russia and anti-Semitic statements by prominent politicians, and have communicated our views to the Russian leadership. At the same time, we have commended the resolute statements of former President Yeltsin and his government condemning anti-Semitism and other expressions of ethnic or religious hatred. We were also pleased by former President Yeltsin's recent announcement in Jerusalem that Russia and Israel will cooperate to combat anti-Semitism.

Nevertheless, we find the Russian National Unity (RNU) youth movement quite troubling, especially given its appearance in so many Russian regions where it enjoys a degree of municipal and regional support. Fortunately, the RNU is not analogous in one important respect to the Hitler Youth movement. It does not enjoy the official recognition and support of the Russian federal government. Indeed, the federal government has attempted to pressure errant municipal and regional governments to crack down on the RNU. In some cases this has resulted in warnings, arrests and court proceedings. The fact that the RNU was deregistered in Moscow as well as at the federal level is a good sign.

It has also been reported that the RNU does not enjoy the widespread support in Russian society that the Hitler Youth were said to have had; older generations of Russians still stigmatize activities associated with the Nazi era. Furthermore, political anti-Semitism had so little public resonance in the recent Duma elections that no one who used anti-Semitism or extreme nationalism as a campaign tool won a seat.

We will continue to encourage the Russian government to prosecute anti-Semitism and extremism wherever it is found. We must speak out loudly on this issue, early and often, as I have said many times before.

WRITTEN SUBMISSION OF RABBI PINCHAS GOLDSCHMIDT

Mr. Chairman and distinguished Members of the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, I submit the following written statement in my dual capacity as Chief Rabbi of Moscow and an officer of the Russian Jewish Congress.

Without repeating what other witnesses have stated to you in person, I wish to briefly review the position of the Russian Jewish Congress with respect to several issues of immediate concern and outline for you a new interfaith leadership initiative which I have undertaken with colleagues from other religious denominations.

While the Law on Religion of the Russian Federation has not directly affected Russian Jewry, some of the leaders of the Russian Jewish Congress were early and public critics of this legislation and continues to advocate for its removal. Freedom for Jews depends upon freedom for all religious groups and upon the very underpinnings of democratic civil society which the Religion Law threatens.

The Chechnya crisis has also involved the Russian Jewish community. Last November, the state-backed ORT-TV channel accused Russian Jews of being a "fifth column" because of concerns the leaders of the Russian Jewish Congress have expressed about the humanitarian costs of this operation. The Russian Jewish Congress has recently organized two fact-finding missions to Dagestan, Ingushetia and other areas in the vicinity of Chechnya in order to gauge the magnitude of the crisis for Jewish and non-Jewish residents and refugees. The Russian Jewish Congress has arranged housing and employment assistance for dozens of Chechen refugees in Moscow, and is currently arranging to place over 80 non-Jewish war refugees from Chechnya.

Anti-Semitism has indeed been on the rise during the past year, and the significant efforts of the U.S. Congress and Administration have made an important difference in encouraging greater responsiveness on the part of Russian officials. The Mayor of Moscow arranged adequate security for Moscow synagogues during last autumn's Jewish holiday season, following on a rash of attacks and attempted attacks on Jews and Jewish institutions. This response, and the increasing but still-insufficient response of the Russian Government, are motivated in no small part by specific Congressional efforts such as those originating with this Commission. Ambassador Robert Seiple, who visited Russia last year as one of his first destinations as Ambassador At Large for International Religious Freedom, has injected a voice of forceful compassion into the dialogue between the U.S. and Russian governments, and I continue to be in regular contact with him and other officials within the Department of State. The Russian Jewish Congress and I also work closely with the National Conference on Soviet Jewry and other representative organizations of the American Jewish community.

I have recently begun coordinating an unprecedented interfaith leadership coalition within the Russian Federation, with which the U.S. Congress and this Commission may be able to play an important role. This religious leadership coalition represents the Russian Orthodox, Jewish, Islamic, Catholic and Lutheran communities of the Russian Federation, seeks U.S. participation in realizing an innovative plan for interfaith cooperation.

Religion has often generated divisive trends within society, whether in ancient or recent history. Within most religious denominations, the forces of moderation are under systemic attack from more extreme elements. Religion also carries the potential for facilitating dialogue and cooperation within and between communities. Leadership is indispensable in mobilizing such change, and common cause between religions is essential as both a means and an end. Despite the significant cleavages and outstanding grievances within modern Russian society, leading clergy from four disparate faiths have united to promote a common agenda of humanitarian action, communal healing, and civil society.

To promote this unified and unifying vehicle, we are developing two programs.

1. A U.S. visit by a select, senior delegation of religious leadership representing the different faiths. This mission will meet with high-level political leadership in Washington, DC, from the Executive and Legislative Branches as well as relevant bodies such as the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom and the related Religious Roundtable, and key representatives from the non-governmental community. Outside Washington, the religious delegation will travel to one or two American cities for exchanges with inter-religious councils and community-based assistance programs. In addition to providing the aegis for such a groundbreaking visit, the United States also offers a broad range of useful models that clergy can apply to Russian society.
2. A substantive assistance program, possibly food aid, to be coordinated in conjunction with appropriate U.S. Government agencies and qualified Russian-based religious organizations. Religious communities in the Russian Federation have already engaged individually in the reliable distribution of food assistance. By cooperating in the distribution of U.S. assistance, the inter-religious coalition will build the working relationships that are so vital in addressing crises that arise in society in general and between religious faiths in particular. The agents of religious moderation will gain credibility among and access to their own constituents. Russia's progress toward democratization will be expedited by a more engaged and involved public.

Given the pioneering nature of this proposal and the seniority of participating clergy (including those from "non-traditional" religions), it is important that the programs receive the highest possible level of U.S. Government involvement. With respect to the U.S. visit, official letters of invitation, a Presidential meeting, Congressional meetings and a public event with religious and political leadership will all send a powerful signal to the members of the delegation and to the Russian public. Coordination with this Commission, the U.S. Ambassador At Large for International Religious Freedom and other dedicated offices will ensure that activities lead consistently toward constructive and achievable results.

Regarding the assistance component of the proposal, I have already initiated discussions with the U.S. Embassy in Moscow and with key officials in Washington, DC who have expressed the will to proceed expeditiously. Russia's volatile political and social landscape increases the need for innovative responses and narrows the window of opportunity.

My colleagues and I, from a range of faiths including both "traditional" and "non-traditional" by the definition of Russia's unfortunate Law on Religion, look forward to working with the Members and staff of this Commission on the interfaith initiative. Using faith-based channels to impact public and official attitudes within the Russian Federation, we hope to move Russia forward on many issues and promote greater understanding of religious freedom, civil society, and religious and ethnic reconciliation.

**PREPARED SUBMISSION OF PASTOR IGOR NIKITIN,
CHAIRMAN, UNION OF CHRISTIANS**

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to greet you in the name of the Russian churches, to thank for your lively and unflagging interest in our country and for your constant, steady voice in support of democracy. And, of course, I would especially like to thank you for not being indifferent toward certain issues of spiritual life in Russia.

Our society has entered a new period of its history. The growth of economical difficulties, the failure of the State to observe certain obligations to own citizens and unprecedented high crime levels—all negatively influenced the national morale. The situation is aggravated by the sweeping growth of things relatively new for the post-soviet State: drug addiction, prostitution, AIDS.

During this difficult period, as in times past throughout our history, people looking for answers for their vitally important questions are turning to God to find comfort and peace from the Lord through the evangelical faith. The number of Christian communities is growing rapidly. The office of the Association of Christian Churches has strong ties with 4,000 churches and religious groups throughout the territory of Russia and countries of the CIS.

Our experience over the past few years shows a growing attitude of trust toward protestant churches.

It is with deep satisfaction, that I tell you about the change of attitude on the part of State officials on issues of individual freedom of conscience and freedom of religion, following Congressman Christopher Smith's visit in 1999 as the Chairman of the Helsinki Commission. It is a well-known fact that St. Petersburg historically is the most tolerant Russian city in which these principles are practiced. One can take a 15 minutes walk on the city's main street, Nevsky Prospect, and see eight cathedrals of different denomination there.

I must confess that just prior to Congressman Smith's visit to St. Petersburg in the spring we were very concerned about the future of freedom of conscience in our country. The pressures applied by reactionary politicians were obvious. They relied on illegal methods in applying the law on freedom of conscience in regard to non-orthodox denominations, which would surely have led to the destabilization of our society. At the beginning of 1999, a many church arsons took place and Christian schools were attacked.

We believe that God Himself brought Congressman Christopher Smith and his delegation from the US Congress to study the issues of freedom of conscience in Russia at just the right time. Glory to God! We can attest to the fact that our State officials gained a completely new perspective on issues relating to the exercise of this freedom.

In St. Petersburg, for example, we see a real desire on the part of the administration of this city to cooperate with Christian organizations. Late last year we signed an agreement with them to work together in the sphere of social issues in the city. In this local agreement, our association represents some sixty churches of greater St. Petersburg. This agreement underscores the fact that the future development of St. Petersburg depends on the spiritual and moral health of society, which is why both sides are willing to join forces for the

sake of peace and unity. Signing this agreement opened doors for successful ministry in prisons, hospitals and schools and broke down barriers that hinder the spread of the gospel in our city.

Moreover—and I would especially like to stress this—the agreement gives us the opportunity to build new and unique relationships with American Christian organizations. The fruits of this activity were soon to follow. With the support of the Administration of St. Petersburg and the Victory Christian Center of Tulsa, OK, we held a Celebration of the 2000th anniversary of Christianity over a three-day period. One of the largest sports complexes in the city could not contain the crowd of people that wanted to attend the meetings. Christmas gifts of food were provided to some 28,000 people by the Feed the Hungry project. With the Worship Center and churches of Pennsylvania we successfully continue our Bible Project. Within the framework of this project the Association of Christian Churches printed and distributed some 225,000 Bibles so essential to believers in Russia.

The agreement allowed our churches to expand their prison ministry. We are especially eager to minister and help in the St. Petersburg prison, “Kresty” (Crosses). This prison was built in the end of the last century for 1,000 inmates. Currently it houses some 10,000–12,000 people that are awaiting trial. Many of them simply go hungry. They sleep in shifts because of the lack of space and in winter the lack of warm clothes is catastrophic. God helped us to drive into “Kresty” with two trucks and deliver not only food and clothing, but also 10,000 Bibles. Right now we have the opportunity to continue to help the prisoners in “Kresty.” According to our agreement with the administration of “Kresty” we will install an intercom radio in each cell, which will enable us to reach every prisoner with two-hour gospel programs several times a week.

We are propagating our successful experience of partnership between State officials and Christian organizations and already are impacting the entire country. The office of the Association sends letters to the Mayors of the cities in which our member churches are located. In these letters we communicate our experience, share about the positive spiritual and social changes that have come about in our city, and recommend local Christian churches for partnership in resolving spiritual and social issues. From their responses, we know that representatives of city administrations from Kaliningrad in the West to Vladivostok in the Far East are interested in cooperating with Christian organizations.

We believe that this is more important now than ever, since the year 2000 has brought Russia a new wave of political difficulties. The beginning of the year renewed our concerns for practical applications of the law on freedom of conscience. During the first days of the New Year, there were many comments in the mass media characterizing our country as an Orthodox state.

During the broadcast of the political negotiations between the leaders of Russia, Ukraine and Byelorussia, Moscow’s television stations persistently called them leaders of Orthodox states—a formulation which completely contradicts the Constitution of the RF. In January Mr. Putin, then the acting President of Russia, used the mass media to deliberately instill a religious mentality in our society.

All this prompted me as President of the Association of Christian Churches to write the acting President. In my letter, I congratulated him on his new position, but was forced to remind him that he is the guarantor of the freedoms and rights of Russian citizens including the right of freedom conscience and religion. In the response of one of Mr. Putin's assistants, I was assured that the Constitution and acting President guarantee these rights and freedoms in Russia. Glory to God!

However, we are still very concerned about the possible use of the official Orthodox Church in political maneuvers. Our concern is quite strong, as we are aware of the many instances of persecution of certain Protestant Churches. Today I am forced to speak of this before the high tribune of the Congress of the United States. I will state only a few cases of the violation of the freedom of conscience:

1. Ekaterinburg: The Church of the New Life—Pastor Victor Sudakov. They suffered several months of persecution in the local mass media. The congregation and their pastor were publicly insulted while local authorities closed their eyes and did nothing. We are especially concerned by the fact that some radicals calling themselves “Orthodox,” joined forces with the ultra nationalist organization “Russian National Unity” and organized a picket near the church. A coalition like this seems to us quite dangerous for our society as a whole and for the reputation of the Orthodox Church in particular.
2. Kirov: The Pentecostal Kirov Christian Center—Pastor Alexnder Vazhenin. Local Authorities denied their re-registration. Moreover the local Department of Justice filed a suit in which this church was called a “cult” and members were accused of dividing families, extorting money, forcing students to abandon their studies, and that all this is allegedly done with the help of hypnosis. The first session of the court disproved all these accusations, but the case was not closed.
3. Irkutsk: The Word of Life Church. Mr. Korneyev, Deputy of the local Duma, uses the mass media to attack the church, calling it “a cult” or “a wolf's den”, and accusing them of being a negative influence on both physical and mental health. The Word of Life church was forced to bring a liable suit against Mr. Korneyev.

At the beginning of this year the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) made an attempt to annul the religious status of foreign missionaries, which in and of itself is a gross violation of human rights and an infraction of the international agreements signed by Russia. Praise God that the period of resistance on the part of the MFA was short and that it did not lead to a conflict between our countries.

Dear ladies and gentlemen, we believe that God by His mercy will stop the persecution, admonish the persecutors of the Christian Church, and give us the opportunity to preach the Gospel openly.

In concluding my short speech I would like to thank the Helsinki Commission Chairman, Congressman, Christopher Smith, once again for his concern for Russia. Also I would like to thank the members of the US Congress for their work in helping to insure the observance of freedom of conscience in Russia. This supports not only the people of Russia, but also all people of good will helping to develop democracy and human rights in our country.

May the Lord bless us all.

**PREPARED SUBMISSION OF ANATOLY KRASIKOV, PRESIDENT,
RUSSIAN CHAPTER OF THE INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS
LIBERTY ASSOCIATION**

One of the founding fathers of the United States, James Madison warned in his book "Memorial and Remonstrance," written more than 200 years ago, "When there is a union of state and church, this has often resulted in using religion to uphold political tyranny." Madison's warning has proved extraordinarily true for Russia today, where the government is still establishing its foundation. It is this government's calling to follow nine centuries of monarchical absolutism, which was in turn followed by 70 years of Soviet totalitarianism.

At first glance, there is no justification for any kind of unsettling thoughts. Approval by the referendum in December, 1993, the year of the "Yeltsin" Constitution, provided support for all international standards of human rights. In Article 14 of the fundamental law of the land straightforward states: "The Russian Federation shall be a secular state. No religion shall be declared an official or compulsory religion...All religious associations shall be separate from the state and shall be equal before the law." Nobody has suggested to change Article 13 of the Constitution, in accordance with doctrine that "no ideology shall be established as a state or compulsory ideology."

It seems Vladimir Putin is more or less in agreement with this. While giving a speech in January of this year at a reception at the Kremlin celebrating the two-thousand year anniversary of the birth of Christ, Putin announced that "there are different religions among the millions of Russians; however, all of us have one future, one country."

The Russian Orthodox Church (ROC), the religious organization in Russia with the greatest following, has stated multiple times its opposition to a merger with the state. In one public speech not long after his election to the position of Patriarch of All Russia, Patriarch Aleksii the Second said, "The scenario of a state church has brought much hardship and many trials. The church should be separate, truly separate from the government. It should have the right to evaluate all events that occur in country from the position of spirituality and morality. It cannot achieve this being of the government."

In practice, however, we often find the opposite. Part of the political elite, on one hand, and part of the Orthodox clergy, on the other hand, continue to undertake great efforts in an attempt to turn Orthodoxy into a new government ideology.

Politicians in Russia, as a rule, do not have even the smallest understanding of Orthodox theology. Its majority is far from being genuinely religious. They are drawn to the perspective of creating a "monolithic union" of Russian society under a new flag. God, for many of them, is simply a means for furthering their own power. Politicians want to force bishops of the ROC to play the role of protector of the "ideological purity" of society, which role was played in the pre-Yeltsin period by party committees of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU).

Supporters of the clericalization of the government, acting within the ROC, are trying to bring potential members into the church by the means of secular authority. A product of the Soviet system, these people did not learn the meaning of genuine Christian missionary work. However, they suggest that they can achieve their goals by

different means; that is, by merging with the government structure, by monopolizing religious broadcasting on state television and radio, and by limiting the freedom of other denominations to preach.

* * *

Leaders of all religious organizations in Russia recognize the unique role which Orthodoxy has played in the history of Russia, beginning with its Christianization 1000 years ago in 988. However, they do not want to waive their constitutional rights. This issue has, in regards to the discriminatory law of 1997 "On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations," provoked many serious discussions in society.

An official representative of human rights in the Russian Federation (RF) and a member of the Russian Duma from the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF), Oleg Mironov voted in favor of this law. However, in conclusion, when it was published later, in April, 1999, Oleg Mironov also admitted his perspective was in accordance neither with Russian pledges for a fair law, nor with international standards.

A month later, Metropolitan Kiril, the Director of the Department for External Church Relationships of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC), spoke before the Greek Parliament with the affirmation that present international norms in the realm of human rights were "exclusively defined in terms of a western and liberal perspective," and that they are in need of revision.

On November 23, 1999, the Constitutional Court of the Russian Federation admitted to incorrectly giving the 1997 law retroactive power. This allowed for one of the dispositions of the law, which discriminated against a large group of "local" religious organizations, having been deprived henceforth of the right to legal counsel. The Constitutional Court did not review other articles of the law.

Life itself has discredited a different disposition of the law, which required the conclusion of the universal re-registration of religious organizations in Russia by December 31, 1999. The registration process provided for the eventuality of liquidation, by due process, of those organizations that did not make it through the re-registration process. A number of local authorities have initiated legal cases with the goal of forbidding those organizations, excluding the Orthodox Church, which will not be re-registered in time. This has occurred, for example, in Chuvashia, and in the Voronezh and Tambov oblasts.

Although directed against "non-traditional" religions, this disposition of the law actually affected, first and foremost, the largest of all churches in Russia, the ROC. The ROC physically did not have enough time to complete the documents for the legalization of the majority of its parishes. The Federal DUMA just approved a one-year extension to the required period for the completion of registration. It now must be finished by December 31, 2000.

It is possible to find documents from local authorities in the archives of many religious organizations. These documents require that questions concerning all different religious organizations agree with the diocese (higher structure) and districts of churches (lower structure) in the (ROC). These questions, in part, regard registration of the organization, construction or rental of a building for church services, and pronouncement of reconsideration within the government apparatus.

* * *

In the year 2000, we began with a conflict of utmost difficulty in Chechnya, the roots of which also extend back to the past, before the twentieth century, the after-effect of which will, undoubtedly, be felt for a very long time in this new millenium. The religious nature of the present war in Chechnya is unanimously rejected by the leaders of not only the Russian Orthodox Church and the Spiritual Organization of Muslims, but also leaders of Russian and world politics. Indeed, the immediate reasons for the conflict lie not in the sphere of religion, but in completely different spheres: political, economic, social and even criminal.

The experience in Chechnya on the eve of the second millenium is maybe the clearest example of mutual cooperation and mutual penetration of a whole complex of factors, each of which could be attributed to the number of generatrices. Among these factors, criminal activity holds a special place in the post-Soviet era.

It is obvious that there is also a political factor, both from the Chechen side where there is an ongoing battle for power between the separate clans of the local elite. Similarly, such a factor exists from the Russian standpoint, on which different reversals of fortune of the Chechen drama have exercised a direct influence, especially in pre-election situations.

Alas, understanding of truisms often come quite late for politicians. Answering questions for journalists at a press conference at the House of Representatives of Russia in early June, 1999, then Prime Minister of Russia Sergei Stepashin made an admission true-to-character: "If I better knew the Koran, I would have made a better decision concerning the Northern Caucasus." "I could have gone through that experience and changed many things for the better had I known the intricacies of religion."

Sergei Stepashin comments were in regard to the first war in Chechnya, which took place from 1994-1996. He played an active role in the decision making process in that war in the capacity of Minister of the Interior. At that time, of course, he did not know that not long after he made that comment, a second war in the Northern Caucasus would begin, only on an even larger scale.

* * *

Can Russia remain a secular government and the Russian Orthodox Church remain independent of the state? We cannot afford not to let this question bother us. One thing is clear: up to this point, while standard-bearers of totalitarianism have not yet acted against the current Constitution of the Russian Federation and against decisions of the higher-ups within the ROC, nothing is lost.

We are grateful to the Congressmen and Government of the United States for the interest expressed regarding the protection of religious freedom throughout the world. We remind those who affirm the rhetoric of meddling in the affairs of other countries of that, which was discussed in accordance with the decision accepted at the OSCE (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe) conference in Moscow on October 3, 1991. It was decided that, "questions concerning the rights of man, fundamental freedoms, democracy and supremacy of law, are of an international nature. These questions are independent of any domestic issues of any respective government."

PREPARED SUBMISSION OF DAN POLLARD, PASTOR,
VANINO BAPTIST CHURCH, RUSSIA

LETTER TO MADELEINE ALBRIGHT,
U.S. SECRETARY OF STATE,
FROM VANINO BAPTIST CHURCH CONGREGATION, VANINO,
RUSSIA

(Letter faxed to me, Dan Pollard, from our church people in Vanino in Feb., 2000. Translated by Dan Pollard, missionary pastor to Russia.)

Vanino Baptist Church asks for your help and assistance in our request to receive a visa for U.S. citizen, Pastor Dan Pollard to return, and permission to live in Russia. Through his sermons and personal Christian character he draws many people to God in the Vanino area.

In 1992 Pastor Dan started his missionary work in Russia. He, along with help from American and Russian believers built a beautiful church building. The church was built in a marsh, a place not considered suitable for building. Pastor Pollard did a titanic job of draining the swamp and constructing a church building.

For the length of 7 years Pastor Dan, together with his family, lived in Vanino and worked to establish a church, become its pastor, spiritual leader, and an example for all the people of Vanino, both believers and unbelievers. He is respected by the citizens of Vanino region. Local citizens are inspired by his industriousness, inexhaustible enthusiasm, generosity, and friendliness with everyone.

There is no doubt in the members and visitors to the church of Pastor Dan Pollard's altruism, but it is obvious that the cause of distrust is coming from bureaucrats at the Khabarovsk *krai* (state) level. In particular, Viktor Nikulnikov, working in the department in conjunction with the party, public political and religious organizations in the region of the Khabarovsk *krai*. He was a former KGB agent, where he also had a career watching over religious groups in the Soviet Union. With the assistance of officials in the Khabarovsk *krai* there was published slanderous statements in the press of the Khabarovsk *krai* (newspapers) with the target of building public opinion against the church and Dan Pollard.

The Khabarovsk *krai* had direct influence on turning down the reregistration of our church, apparently afraid that our church would continue our activity with the legal capacity by law to invite Dan Pollard so that he can continue his missionary activity in conformity with the new Russian law of 9/19/97 "Of Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations".

If our church is only a religious group, but not organized (reregistered), we cannot give invitations to foreign workers for the purpose of preaching, according to the above mentioned law. It goes without saying that the present law is unclear, with separate statutes disagreeing with the universal Declaration human rights (statutes 18

and 19 of the Declaration). Statute 27 of the above mentioned law was agreed by a decision of the Constitutional court not to be in conformity to the Russian Constitution.

Our church is already a close knit community, which credit goes to our Spiritual leader and mentor, Pastor Dan Pollard. At the present time, we have no alternative for another pastor.

The decree of the president of the Russian Federation, "Concerning action exonerating religious workers and believers, victims of baseless repression" from 3/14/96 No. 378, condemned long-standing terror "unrestricted Bolshevik party-soviet regime in respect of spiritual workers and believers of all confessions." This terror, exterminating most qualified workers in Baptist churches appears for a long time, the reason why that for us we have a scarcity of qualified pastors. So, in a Bible college in Khabarovsk, the teaching of students is brought about by teachers from America.

Pastor Pollard already has certified experience and much skill in churches; for seven years working in Vanino he has already become closely linked with the people and this appearance is most important.

Please help Pastor Dan return to Russia.

May God preserve you!

With respect, the members
of Vanino Baptist Church

(signatures of members)

**LETTER FAXED TO ME, DAN POLLARD, FROM OUR CHURCH
PEOPLE IN VANINO IN FEBRUARY 2000.**

Translated by Dan Pollard)

missiothis appearance is most important.

Please help Pastor Dan return to Russia.

May God preserve you!

With respect, the members
of Vanino Baptist Church

(signatures of members)

Dan Pollard, pastor
364 45th Ave. SE
Salem, OR 97301
(503) 391-6755

(our church and home address in Russia)

Dan Pollard
Vanino Baptist Church
Volzhskaya st. #2
Vanino, Russia 682860

LETTER TO PRESIDENT WILLIAM J. CLINTON
FROM VANINO BAPTIST CHURCH CONGREGATION,
VANINO, RUSSIA

February, 2000

Dear Mr. President,

I am an attender of the church which was built in Vanino, Russia. Pastor Dan Pollard is an example of honesty, integrity, and is a hard worker. In our collapsing country he gives us hope and faith. We are asking you to help solve questions about his return to Russia.

(signature)

Translated by Dan Pollard, pastor
Vanino Baptist Church
Volzhskaya st. #2
Vanino, Russia 682860

home address:
Dan Pollard
364 45th Ave SE
Salem, OR 97301
(503) 391-675

**PREPARED SUBMISSION OF
THE WATCH TOWER BIBLE SOCIETY**

SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

The Office of General Counsel of Jehovah's Witnesses requests that the U.S. Helsinki Commission write to the General Prosecutor and the Ministry of Justice about the pending cases and the denial of permission to register places of worship. The letter could raise questions and concerns about pursuing the prosecution given the recent decision of the Constitutional Court upholding the rights of Jehovah's Witnesses, the re-registration of the Administrative Center of Jehovah's Witnesses on April 29, 1999 under Russia's 1997 religion law, and the Russian Ombudsman Mironov's letter of January 17, 2000.

The Russian officials to whom letters should be addressed are:

1. Vladimir Vasilyevich
USTINOV
Acting Prosecutor General
Office of the Prosecutor General
of the Russian Federation
ul. Bolshaya Dmitrovka,
d. 15a Moscow 103793
RUSSIAN FEDERATION

2. Anatoliy Ilyich
ZUYEV
Acting Moscow City Prosecutor
Office of the Moscow City Prosecutor
ul. Novokuznetskaya,
d. 27 Moscow 113184
RUSSIAN FEDERATION

Letter dated February 7, 2000, from V.V. Borshchov, Chairman of the Permanent Human Rights Chamber, to V.A. Yakovlev, the Governor of St. Petersburg, about this "incitement of religious tolerance"

Even though most congregations in Russia having been registered/re-registered under the 1997 Religion Law to date, no congregations in St. Petersburg have been registered/re-registered, representing approximately 10,000 Jehovah's Witnesses.

**POLITICAL CONSULTATIVE COUNCIL WITH THE PRESIDENT
OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION
PERMANENT HUMAN RIGHTS CHAMBER**

NO. 11/00

FEBRUARY 7, 2000

To the Governor of St. Petersburg V. A. Yakovlev
Respected Vladimir Anatolyevich!

In connection with a letter received from the religious organisation Administrative Centre of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia concerning numerous facts of incitement of religious intolerance towards followers of this denomination, I ask that you send to the Chamber information regarding the measures taken by the city administration to counteract the anti-constitutional actions of public associations and mass media that crudely insult the religious sensibilities of citizens. I ask that your reply be sent to the address of the Permanent Human Rights Chamber (Staraya pl., d. 4, Moscow, 103132). Attachment: 6 pp.

Respectfully,
Chairman of the Permanent Human Rights
Chamber of the Political Consultative
Council with the
President of the Russian Federation
[signature]

OMBUDSMAN OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION

103084, MOSCOW, MYASNITSKAYA UL., BUILDING 47
TEL. 207-39-69, FAX 207-39-77

NO. OM 508-22

JANUARY 17, 2000-02-02

To the Russian Federation Ministry for the Press,
Television and Radio Transmission,
and Media for Mass Communication M. Y. Lesin
Dear Mikhail Yuryevich,

I have received a letter from the religious organization Administrative Center of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia complaining of dissemination of unreliable information in the mass media regarding the history, current status, and activity of the organization of Jehovah's Witnesses in the Russian Federation. As can be seen from the documents attached to the letter, certain journalists have likewise earlier violated provisions of the Mass Media Act in media reports about this organization, to which the decision of the Presidential Judicial Chamber on Informational Disputes bears witness (February 1998). A review of copies of the attached newspaper articles shows that some of them display a certain prejudice toward this religious organization, discourteous expressions, inaccurate presentation of facts, use of information that is unverified or has been previously refuted in court, false interpretation of Russian law on the freedoms of conscience and religion, and so forth. Truly, one can get the impression that around this religious organization, which is operating in Russia on a legal basis, there is an attempt to intentionally form an atmosphere of suspicion and feed hostility toward its members and the religious beliefs that they espouse. Likewise, this may provoke discrimination against citizens on the basis of their religious attitudes and unlawful restriction of the activity of the religious associations that they have founded. Taking into consideration the public significance of guaranteeing religious freedom in the Russian Federation as a fundamental human right enshrined in the Russian Constitution, and taking into consideration the attitude of the European community toward any manifestations of religious intolerance, I ask that you consider the documents that I am forwarding to you and make an appropriate decision. On my part I believe it would be expedient to think through the matter of organizing legal education of journalists that specialize in issues related to freedom of conscience and the state of religious organizations in the Russian Federation.

Attachment: referenced letter no. kl-1519 of December 16, 1999 (137 pp.)

Ombudsman of the Russian Federation
[signature]
O. O. Mironov

NEWS ARTICLE TRANSLATED FROM RUSSIAN ROSSIYSKAYA
GAZETA, OCTOBER 2, 1999

**A QUESTION FOR ST. PETERSBURG CITY LEADER V.
YAKOVLEV: ARE YOU THE GOVERNOR OR JUST A WITNESS?**

In Tatarstan Wahhabites [Muslim extremists] roam free, whereas in St. Petersburg Jehovah's Witnesses feel at home

This is not the first time our newspaper has sounded the alarm about the clout of the Jehovah's Witness sect in St. Petersburg. But city officials either don't know how to read, or... Judging from the facts, they have the warmest of relationships with foreign sectarians. What is behind this? If officials are indifferent to the fate of Petersburg youth, then perhaps Governor Yakovlev would at least care for the future of his grandchild.

[Picture of a smiling Gov. Yakovlev with his grandson in his arms; newspaper headlines in the foreground with the titles: Sect-Peterburg, Sect-Peterburg-2, Sect-Peterburg-3. Trophies of Satanists already settling [...], all anti-Witness hate articles published by Rossiyskaya gazeta in the past]

Two immaculately dressed young people stood in broad daylight on Kolomyazhskiy Prospect near a glittering complex of buildings and invited passers-by to "stop in for a visit", extending their hands in greeting.

The building, an Assembly Hall of Jehovah's Witnesses, was truly striking not only in its rationalist style of architecture, but also its fine decoration and conveniences.

One will hardly be able to find a more comfortable hall in all of St. Petersburg able to hold 1600 people at one time; there is even a special pool to the right of the stage behind glass where the Jehovahists will conduct baptismal rites.

The complex, located on a one hectare square on the outskirts of Udelnyy Park—a favorite spot of Petersburgers for relaxation - has for several years been the cause of numerous protests and demonstrations of city residents protesting its appearance. But no matter how much Petersburgers protested, how many thousands of signatures they gathered, how many letters they sent to the governor of the city, how many media exposes were written, nothing came of any of this; last weekend was the grand opening of the first Assembly Hall of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia. Of course, this was not of God's design.

This organization, which considers itself religious, but is in essence a huge foreign wealth-amassing corporation, just simply has an incredible amount of money, a fantastic amount of practically free labor, and excellent managers. Banned in dozens of countries, these sectarians have nevertheless managed to build a grandiose complex in the cultural capital of Russia, demonstrating the seriousness of their intentions. And they are indeed extremely serious and very dangerous, and we have on numerous occasions spoken out from the pages of Rossiyskaya gazeta about the need to follow the example of many democratic countries whom we are trying to imitate and take a careful look at what goes on behind the high fences of the temples of Jehovah's Kingdom.

Finally last year the French saw the light! The government of that country stopped counting Jehovah's Witnesses as a religious organization and listed it among the 173 most dangerous sects.

Moreover, they cancelled all benefits and levied a 60 percent tax on them. Now Jehovah's Witnesses owe the French government 300 million francs. For now they are not paying, and the government has impounded all their movable and immovable property, thus suspending their activity. But Russia is a different story, whose citizens, having received freedom, became victims of the representatives of hundreds of religious organizations.

Jehovah's Witnesses, who have perverted 1200 Bible texts, have today become the main hunters for human souls in Russia. In a short time they have already managed to create 230 centers and 760 congregations throughout the country!

In St. Petersburg alone, according to their own statistics, they have registered 105,000 official members, who have undergone water baptism, and 250,000 city residents regularly attend their meetings, still another approximately 500,000 Petersburgers study Jehovahist teachings at home. And all these citizens of the cultural capital of Russia will be taken from our society in the near future, they dedicate themselves completely to service to Jehovah. That means breakup of families, hundreds of collectives deprived of good specialists, since they cannot fully work at their own specialty, why, their very teaching forbids it, which calls on them to give themselves completely to the service of Jehovah God, these people reject their relatives, loved ones, and friends. Is this what you want, Mr. Governor Yakovlev? Is it possible that no one has related to you the frightening, soul-chilling stories that have taken place in families split by this sect foreign-to-Russians?

Is it possible that you do not know how much sorrow and unhappiness that the representatives of this sect bring? Is it possible that you do not know that small children as well as parents will serve Jehovah God, but they in contrast with all other children will be forbidden to read anything but a distorted Bible? They will not know one fairy tale, will not read one magazine except "The Watchtower", will not see cartoons on television, will not make friends, since their friends can only be among Jehovahists, and normal children can only teach the "rules of this satanic world".

Last Saturday I saw dozens of these youths walking into the attractive Assembly Hall of Jehovah's Witnesses together with their parents. They are very little, they still do not understand what threat is hanging over their childhood.

People of authority in St. Petersburg, do you not have pity these children? The expansion of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia, for example, in St. Petersburg, simply horrifies in its scale.

Some time ago a mighty administrative center with its own poligraphic base was built forty kilometers from the city. Among other things, up to 90 tons of literature arrive weekly from abroad on huge trucks, which are forwarded from the village of Solnechnoye throughout the CIS. Furthermore, in the center of the city, there are 13 halls operative on Chernyakhovskovo Street, where Jehovahist meetings are conducted. In another region of the city—Kupchino—they turned a

huge shopping center into a Kingdom Hall of Jehovah's Witnesses. And now on Kolomyazhskiy Prospect they have opened an assembly hall with 1600 seats and another five halls seating 200.

However, it would seem that even this is not enough for them. Jehovah's Witnesses have bought still another huge site on the southwest side of the city in the area of Partisan Gorkavovo Street.

There, evidently, still another center will be built. All of St. Petersburg is already covered by this sect's web, which is so attractive to city authorities. It seems rather strange that the city administration in St. Petersburg decides all questions in favor of this organization. Apparently, it is harder to turn down the rich and prosperous than the poor. Ten years ago people in our land knew little about Jehovah's Witnesses. Can you imagine what we can expect in the next ten years if we do not start opposing the expansion of this organization? I saw dozens of newspaper quotes from the most well-known newspapers praising the Jehovists in the display windows of the assembly hall during its open house. But is the fact that these articles were paid advertising enough to justify this? During these same last two years I have not seen a single exposé of Jehovah's Witnesses in the local press. The question of who else besides the St. Petersburg Committee for the Protection of the Family and Personality will stand up in the city to do battle against totalitarian sects remains unanswered. But this is not a rhetorical question. Are the lives of hundreds of thousands of Petersburgers, who may end up under the arches of Jehovah's Kingdom Halls, of no value to us? Ideological terrorists encroaching on the souls of Orthodox Russians are no less dangerous than those who are blowing up Russia with TNT and plastic explosives.

Sergei ALYOKHIN

Our reporter

St. Petersburg

**NEWS ARTICLE TRANSLATED FROM RUSSIAN ROSSIYSKAYA
GAZETA, THURSDAY, OCTOBER 14, 1999**

***JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES AND THEIR PETERSBURG
ADVOCATES***

[Photo of St. Petersburg Governor Yakovlev carrying his grandchild. To the right of this are boldprint headlines of previous negative articles about Jehovah's Witnesses in Rossiyskaya gazeta]

We hardly would have returned to this topic so soon, had it not been for such a furious reaction from our readers: from both Jehovah's Witnesses' supporters, as well as from those who have suffered from their activity, and who are now attempting to get the attention of authorities at all levels to tell them just what a danger this organization actually represents.

We had no doubt that Jehovah's Witnesses would not leave our publication unattended. Quite some time ago a curious document, which was drafted at their Administrative Center, came into our dossier. The date: December 3, 1998.

In essence, it is rather strict directive that states "...it would be good if the editorial offices of newspapers where articles about us appear were to receive our response", and further spells out exactly how the letters should be written. However, it turns out that this document is not for the eyes of the rank and file members of the orga-

nization, but exclusively for the body of elders: "Do not make copies of this letter. Do not place this letter or the addresses [note of author: where to write] on the bulletin board." Judging by the instructions, letters will also be sent to the head of the department of the Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation responsible for the registration of religious associations, to the public prosecutor's office, and to other addresses indicated in the document.

A certain Roman Shamrai sent a letter to our editorial office in which he accused Rossiyskaya gazeta of spreading non-factual information and claimed the author of the article is misinformed.

Does the end justify the means?

From Roman Shamrai's letter to our editorial office: "Beside all the unobjective appraisals of the activity of Jehovah's Witnesses, your article indicated that people who profess the religion of Jehovah's Witnesses are 'sectarians,' and 'very dangerous'. In actual fact they are honest, law-abiding citizens of their countries..."

If not so long ago smiling, and, as a rule, well-dressed people, were able to converse well with strangers stopped you somewhere on the street or unexpectedly turned up at the doorstep of your home with the offer to discuss the Bible together, then nowadays Jehovah's Witnesses have begun to preach in St. Petersburg... by telephone. And they not only telephone us at home, but bother workers with their offers at various institutions, institutes of higher learning, and commercial firms.

So just who are these people who are addressing us with their ingratiating voices and who have unleashed on St. Petersburg a truly aggressive campaign towards increasing the number of their members? This is the question I that asked first and foremost of Aleksei Shvechikov, the Director of the Center of International Institutes of Higher Learning for problems of Science and Religion, Senior Lecturer, Candidate of Philosophical Sciences, and author of a book about the religious, social-political, and ideological doctrine of Jehovahism.

"In my view," says Aleksei Nikolayevich, "the main line of strategy of the Jehovahists has become more clearly visible; they sincerely wish to replace traditional Orthodoxy with their own false teaching, and believe me, this is the primary and most serious danger. It is exactly this that explains their present vigorous onslaught.

"Look, even Sergei Ivanenko, author of a book which defends the Jehovahists, and whom the Witnesses love to cite, could not restrain himself from mentioning what Jehovah's Witnesses carefully hide: 'Forms of Protestantism that have become deeply rooted in Russia remain on the fringe of public and religious life; they have not become, and it is unlikely that they can become in the foreseeable future, an idealistic and moral foundation for the development of honest business. Will Jehovah's Witnesses be able to meet this challenge?' It's hard to say it more directly than that ...

"The author of the letter to your editorial office was correct only in one thing," continues Aleksei Nikolayevich, "It was by no means just today that Jehovahism decided to engage in criticizing Christianity from within as it were. Today, across the ocean, it is evident that the Brooklyn Governing Body, has realized that the situation in Russia has gotten to the point where it is possible to bring their plans to fruition. Since at present there is practically no opposition, even from the hierarchy of the Russian Orthodox Church, Jehovahist congregations and

Kingdom Halls are growing all over Russia like mushrooms after a rain. And the newspaper's alarm on behalf of St. Petersburg is justified, since St. Petersburg has become the sect-capital of the country. Clearly, the Brooklyn center is becoming richer - it is acquiring real estate in Russia. But can it really be the authorities are powerless to oppose this?"

"The religion of the Jehovahists has long since turned into its opposite—an ideology. Only they cannot publicly acknowledge this fact, for this would be tantamount to suicide. On the contrary, the more ideological this organization becomes, the more impudently it tries to prove its 'true' religiosity. It must be acknowledged that the Jehovahists are nevertheless successful at blurring people's awareness by verbal tightrope-walking, presenting lies as truth. They are successful thanks to a well-oiled machine of ideological and psychological indoctrination. But this deception cannot work forever. And it is necessary to speak more about what consequences await people who are under such illusions."

"Grandma, you're from Satan..."

From the letter of Roman Shamrai to the editorial office: "The majority of Jehovah's Witnesses have wonderful close families. Jehovah's Witnesses do not practice violence and have no intention of forcing anyone to follow their teachings..."

A barrage of calls came down on Rossiyskaya gazeta's office in St. Petersburg after our last article. People who had lost their loved ones due to the Jehovahists thanked the newspaper for raising the issue. One of the women who called requested a meeting with me:

"Jehovists seek people with an open heart, they find them and then turn them into soulless people. The sect broke up my daughter's family and then completely took her and my grandson away from me. We live as though we were strangers. I have to tell you about it..."

...Galina Semyonovna and I wandered along the paths of the park which was covered with a carpet of yellow maple leaves and I could not help but notice how she kept glancing [with a face] full of anguish and pain at the young children who were walking with their grandmothers in the park on a Saturday afternoon. This former elementary school teacher has been deprived of delightful association with her own grandson for many years now...

"Just imagine," she sighs, "On Monday it's Andrey's birthday. He turns eight, and I can't give him a present on that day. Jehovahists don't celebrate birthdays or any of the other holidays for that matter...I remember I decided to surprise my grandson with a New Year's tree. I decorated it and got a present ready and heard from his lips a ghastly 'Grandma, you're from Satan...'

"From the time he turned three years old Julia began to drag the child to meetings of the Jehovahists. The brothers and sisters got their tight clutches on her, and she quit work at the kindergarten, made ends meet with odd jobs, wasting all her time at the meetings, and began preaching together with the child. She taught Andrei how to preach. She keeps accurate notes for reports, where, when and how much she preached. Do you know how Andrei learned to count? My daughter would give him math problems: "Petya handed out four magazines and Masha handed out three. How many Watchtower magazines did the children hand out altogether?"

“No matter what my son-in-law tried to do, it wouldn’t work. He tried to gain custody of the child during the divorce proceedings, but the court took the side of the mother-Jehovist. And now the boy’s life is taking a different course: He doesn’t know how to associate with normal children, he’s introverted and looks ill... It this really the way I dreamed I would ever see him! The sectarians have deprived him of a normal childhood. Imagine, we live across from the Peter and Paul fortress, but the child has never in his life seen the colorful, festive fireworks. He simply has not been allowed to go to the window, after all, this is from the Devil as well... So just what will become of my grandson? How am I to struggle for him? What happy families do the Jehovists, who are sowing unhappiness and pain, have the right to write about?”

And so, not the editorial office, but you, Roman Shamrai, are misleading us with your letter. For example, in listing the countries where the activity of Jehovah’s Witnesses is banned, you hint at their specific political structure. But for some reason or another you forget to add along with this that this year the Council of Europe has called to step up the battle against the Witnesses, and that in the most developed nations, where you are so especially proud of your activity, there exists around 500 centers dedicated to exposing Jehovah’s Witnesses. And it is no coincidence that there is now a massive amount of information on the Internet exposing them. The world has sensed the danger...

As for the Jehovists supposed non-violence, you are once again deceiving us, because you know perfectly well that is practically impossible for anyone to leave the sect except in “cement overshoes” at the bottom of a river...

I have been reading David Reed’s book, *Behind the Scenes at the Watchtower*. And it is impossible to not believe a man who has spent more than a decade among the Witnesses.

Who peeks through the keyhole of the bedroom?

From the letter of Roman Shamrai to the editorial office: “Jehovah’s Witnesses are recognized as the most honest people in the Federal Republic.”

And now a few words about how the “orderly and honest people behave.” But this information is not for Roman Shamrai, who was so offended by the article in the *Rossiyskaya gazeta*, but for one of my colleagues, a long-time acquaintance, to whom the Witnesses seem so likeable, contemporary, and energetic.

It has become clear that members of the Watchtower Society - yes, that’s what Jehovah’s Witnesses call themselves - who love to highlight their exceptional orderliness and honesty, have no qualms, as it turns out, about intruding into the bedroom of married couples in order to point out what is acceptable and what is not in their sexual relations. In his book, former Witness David Reed writes about this in detail.

As it turns out, as early as 1972 the main magazine of the Jehovists, *The Watchtower*, touched upon the question of the propriety of various forms of conduct in the marital bed. From this point onward members of the organization of Jehovah’s Witnesses began to be accountable before the leaders for their conduct in the bedroom. Those who crossed the boundaries were threatened with being interrogated be-

fore a judicial committee of the congregation and... expulsion from the organization. Wives started to inform on their husbands to the local elders, accusing them of improper conduct in bed. The elders would summon the husbands for interrogation. Married couples were forced to reveal their intimate lives before outsiders! Jehovah's Witnesses did what normal people would consider loathsome, repulsive, and impossible. This really makes me want to ask my acquaintance; would he want to see for example, his daughter giving testimony to such a commission?

Who can speak well of a murderer-mother?

From the letter of Roman Shamrai to the editorial office: "Many Russian families have been practicing this religion for three and four generations. They are spoken well of by neighbors, the authorities, and at work."

In preparing this material, I had the occasion to speak with many people who have run across the activity of Jehovah's Witnesses and know about them, and not by hearsay. Petersburg journalist Oleg Zazorin, who has more than once written about the danger which they represent, recounted to me that a criminal case has been going on in the Krasnoselskiy region of Petersburg. The case was brought about because of the death of a child, who had not been in this world even a year. Danya Krivtsov died from congenital intestinal obstruction, although the doctors had a chance to save him. This would have required an operation, but once the parents found out that during the course of the operation a blood serum would be used, they declined as members of the organization of Jehovah's Witnesses.

"Jehovah's Witnesses," says Oleg Zazorin, "truly have a broad interpretation of the counsel to 'abstain from blood' set forth in the Acts of the Apostles. A member of the sect cannot permit himself a blood transfusion under any circumstances, even if his life depends upon it. This prohibition is elevated among them to the level of worship, and there are plenty of cases of deaths of unfortunate children.

"Two years ago three-year-old Vanya Semyonov passed away in a reanimation ward. Within one year of his death the doctors had made the terrible diagnosis; acute monoblastic leucosis. A blood transfusion was required. But the mother, a fanatical believer of the teachings of The Watchtower, did not even give the doctors the opportunity to take a blood sample for analysis. And for an entire year Vanya died a torturous death before her eyes. She brought him to the hospital already half dead and handed over a written affirmation which said: 'I, Semyonova Galina Fyodorovna, being in sound mind and clear memory, categorically refuse the following methods of medical treatment of my son, Semyonov Ivan: blood transfusion, red corpuscle mass, plasma. I have been warned about the consequences of the absence of such treatment, including the possibility of a fatal outcome. I draw up this document on my own initiative. This is in accordance with my rights as a patient and my convictions as one of Jehovah's Witnesses.'

"I could continue," says my colleague, "about the tragedy that took place with Dima Nikitin and many others, but just how many of these ghastly cases have taken place in St. Petersburg nobody knows. But the main point for me, as well as for any sane person, is that it is completely incomprehensible how and why such a misanthropic organization can feel so free on the banks of the Neva."

A Jehovahist who wrote to our editorial office noted on one page of his letter that "Citizens who profess this religion are well-spoken of by their neighbors, the authorities, and at work." But tell me, who would speak well of a mother who for the course of a year quietly watched as

**FACT SHEET CITY AND REGION OF LIPETSK:
COURT DENIAL OF APPEAL OF THE LOCAL MINISTRY OF
JUSTICE DEPARTMENT DENYING REGISTRATION OF THE
CONGREGATION UNDER THE 1997 RELIGION LAW**

On October 14, 1999, the Justice Department of City and Region of Lipetsk denied registration of the Local Christian Religious Organization of Jehovah's Witnesses in Lipetsk. Once again, Jehovah's Witnesses were denied registration on the basis of their religious beliefs and manifestation thereof:

Since worship services, according to the founding documents, is composed completely of Bible study and preaching, these two types of 'worship services' must be carried out only in places specially set aside for that purpose according to the law. Public speaking (regardless of whether it is political or religious) is regulated by the ruling "On the procedure for organizing and conducting rallies, street marches, demonstrations and picket acts" in accordance with which a application is filed with the administration one week in advance, indicating the time and location for the public speech. Here there can be no exceptions. Nowhere is it stated how many speakers participate in the speech: one, two, ten, or how many listeners they attract by their speech. Streets and squares are public places, and approaches to passersby with public preaching or political agitation are regulated by the same legislative acts. [...] Furthermore, members of the religious organization of Jehovah's Witnesses carry out preaching from "house to house" (2.2.1 of the Charter) and enter into contact with citizens of other confessions, thus their obtrusiveness and aggression to one degree or another can be classified as an intentional insult to the sensibilities of citizens in connection with their attitude toward religion, in such cases what is taking place is the task of changing the confession of the householder, which is viewed by the citizenry as an infringement of their rights (Article 3.6 of the Federal Law "On the Freedom of Conscience and on Religious Associations"). At the same time we can report, that the Regional Expert Council for Conducting State Religious Studies believes that the information about the basic teachings and corresponding practice is incomplete, and therefore unreliable, does not reflect the primary doctrine of the teaching, and contains elements of propaganda of superiority over other (Christian) confessions.

On February 9, 2000, the court denied the appeal of a decision by the local Ministry of Justice Department, denying registration of the congregation under the 1997 religion law; reasons yet to be received. The Prosecutor led "expert" evidence whose opinion it was that Jehovah's Witnesses should be banned because they are not Christian, they do not believe in the Holy Trinity, and they engage in public preaching.

REGISTRATION OF RELIGIOUS ASSOCIATIONS OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES IN RUSSIA

Article 11.8 of the Russian Federal Law "On the Freedom of Conscience and on Religious Associations" introduced a new provision, namely the discretionary right for government bodies to appoint a state expert analysis of religious beliefs as a pre-requisite for associations applying for legal status. This, in combination with Articles 12, 14, and 27.3 of the above law provide for the denial or revocation of registration of religious associations on a number of vaguely defined grounds.

Jehovah's Witnesses are confident that their religious practice withstands the closest scrutiny before Russian and international law. However, practice has shown that these provisions have served as a discriminatory weapon to obstruct their organized religious activity:

On November 5, 1999, the District Court of Uchaly of the Republic of Bashkortostan announced the preaching activity and dissemination of the beliefs of Jehovah's Witnesses in the town of Uchaly to be illegal and infringing the freedoms and the rights of other citizens.

FACT SHEET UCHALY COMMUNITY OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES V. UCHALY PROSECUTOR

December 30, 1999

The hearing scheduled for December 30, 1999, in the Supreme Court of Bashkortostan has been adjourned until January 31, 2000.

DECEMBER 1, 1999

In its letter of December 1, 1999, No. 5023, the Uchaly District Court refused to consider the appeal of the local organization of Jehovah's Witnesses in objecting to the incompleteness and inaccuracy of the record of the proceedings of the court hearing and extending the deadline for filing this objection. In fact, by this the plaintiff was refused (only on formal reasons) to make any objection to the incomplete record of the court proceedings. The court approved on November 2, 1999, the application of the representatives of Jehovah's Witnesses to permit the audio recording of the court session for precise reproduction of the proceedings. The proceedings entailed in total 120 pages of typed transcription. The approved application to use the tape recorder confirmed the incompleteness and inaccuracy of the court session's minutes, extending four whole days but composing only 27 pages by the court's secretary. Hearing of the Uchaly case in the Supreme Court of Bashkortostan is scheduled on December 30, 1999.

November 5, 1999 Court of Uchaly of the Republic of Bashkortostan, a member of the Russian Federation located in the South Ural found in favor of the Prosecutor's Office of Uchaly and issued some shameful judgments: Non-observance of traditional holidays is a violation of the law; Jehovah's Witnesses have no right to bring up their children according to their religious beliefs; the presiding overseer of the local congregation was found guilty of teaching the Bible to minors in spite of the parents' prior authorization; interference by the

Prosecutor's Office in the private lives of Jehovah's Witnesses was approved; parents who are Jehovah's Witnesses have no "priority rights" to raise their children; all members of the local congregation were found guilty of "misbehavior in their family life;" and preaching and dissemination of the beliefs of Jehovah's Witnesses in Uchaly were declared illegal and an infringement on the freedoms and rights of other citizens. Information on this decision has been supplied to human rights organizations and government agencies.

November 2, 1999 Court hearing on Uchaly Community of Jehovah's Witnesses v. Uchaly Prosecutor. Prosecutor claims that Jehovah's Witnesses teach religion to minors and refuse blood transfusions in violation of the law. After two such warnings, application to liquidate can be made, similar to Moscow. Local congregation filed this court action to challenge the warning.

Please refer to our Office of General Counsel E-mail to you dated 12/27/99 which contained 14 pages of information regarding the lawsuit in Uchaly. If that E-mail is no longer available to you, we will be happy to forward it for your reference.

Sincerely,

Gregory D. Olds
Associate General Counsel