

# Belarus

<b>Response to Information Request:</b>	Number: BLR98001.ZNY
<b>Date:</b>	
<b>Subject:</b>	Belarus: Information on the treatment of Jehovah's Witnesses
<b>From:</b>	INS Resource Information Center, Washington, DC
<b>Keywords:</b>	Belarus / Jehovah's Witness / Religions / Armenia / Georgia / Abkhazia / Conscientious objection

## Query:

What is the status of Jehovah's Witnesses in Belarus and in which other countries of the Former Soviet Union might Jehovah's Witnesses experience mistreatment?

## Response:

### Belarus

Reports of harassment of Jehovah's Witnesses in Belarus could not be found in sources consulted by the RIC. As reported in the *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1997*, the Constitution of Belarus guarantees the freedom of religion, but certain Government policies restrict this right in practice. Religions in Belarus must be registered to receive the full protection of the law. (*Country Reports 1997 1998*, 986) According to the Foreign Service Secretary of the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society (Jehovah's Witnesses world headquarters) in New York, Jehovah's Witnesses were recently registered in Belarus, and they have been able to practice their faith without problems or mistreatment. (Watchtower 14 April 98)

### Other Countries of the former Soviet Union

The Foreign Service Secretary reported that the Jehovah's Witnesses are not yet registered in Armenia, however this has not yet caused any problems. Despite a prohibition against proselytizing, Jehovah's Witnesses in Armenia have been able to operate unhindered as they do in other areas of the world. (Watchtower 14 April 98) There have been reports of Jehovah's Witnesses imprisoned for refusing to perform military service because there is no civilian alternative to military service for conscientious objectors. However, Watchtower does not consider this a particular problem, since Jehovah's Witnesses are imprisoned in a number of countries for evading conscription. (AI January 1998, 3-8; Watchtower 14 April 1998).

In Georgia, a similar situation exists. Jehovah's Witnesses have yet to be registered and have experienced bureaucratic delays in their attempts to register. However, save for some difficulties relating to importing foreign publications, Jehovah's Witnesses have been able to operate throughout most of Georgia without problems. There have been problems reported in the disputed region of Abkhazia. There were reports in 1996 and 1997 of illegal searches of the homes of Jehovah's Witnesses and the burning of literature found within. In addition, in 1997 Jehovah's Witnesses (including women) were taken into custody and beaten. (Watchtower 14 April 1998)

## References:

Amnesty International. January 1998. *Armenia: Summary of Amnesty International's Concerns* (AI: EUR 54/01/98). London: Amnesty International, International Secretariat.

*Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1997*. 1998. United States Department of State. Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office.

Molohan, Charles. Foreign Service Secretary, The Watchtower Bible and Tract Society (Jehovah's Witnesses). Brooklyn, NY. 14 April 1998. Telephone Interview.

**Other Sources Consulted:**

NEXIS

Region file, Central Eurasia. Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS) Reports. January 1996 to April 1998.

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