Russia: Protests in Rostov against Jehovah's Witnesses

After accusations, trials and physical attacks, street protests now target the JW. Slogans and banners stigmatize the community as an extremist sect.

By Asia News

Moscow - After house raids, court trials for extremism and physical aggression now the Jehovah's Witnesses (JW) in Russia are also the target of street protests. Last July 23, in Rostov-on-Don, southern Russia, different public organizations and institutions took part in a picket organized by the movement "Rostov without drugs" targeting the JWs.

The protest which took place in Gorky Park was attended by around fifty people, including members of the Orthodox youth centre, youth organizations "Aktiv 61" and "Concept of Social Security."

The demonstrators gathered hoisting placards and chanting slogans "against the sect" as the JWs are regarded in Russia. Some banners recalled the various sentences for extremism inflicted on the community, while others read: "Denial of patriotism, stupidity or treason?" Or "refusing blood transfusions is a crime."

Rostov is one of the areas where the authorities and population aversion to the Jehovah's Witnesses is strongest. Already in 2009 the city of Taganrog JWs provincial court had ruled that they were religious extremists and ordered the dissolution of the organization, the confiscation of property and the prohibition of any activity.

As reported by Sova Center, according to an improvised survey by journalists who followed the protest, out of 40 respondents among the locals, 34 were opposed to Jehovah's Witnesses calling them "inadequate to the traditions of the Russian people."

Of the religious minorities in the former USSR, the Jehovah's Witnesses are among the most harassed. With about 200 thousand believers scattered throughout the Federation, they are accused of sectarianism, "religious extremism", "incitement to social isolation" and behaviours that undermine the country's civic life.

Moreover Russian authorities do not like some of the practices of the faithful such as

conscientious objection to military service, the refusal to use weapons, the renunciation of blood transfusions and the demand for total dedication of followers to the community.

Source: Asia News