

For Immediate Release
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France ordered to pay millions for illegal taxation of Jehovah's Witnesses

STRASBOURG, France—The European Court of Human Rights ruled today that the government of France must pay over 4.5 million euros (\$5,600,000 US approx.) for full restitution to Jehovah's Witnesses for violating their religious freedom through illegal taxation.

Last year, on June 30, 2011, the European Court ruled that the government of France violated the rights of Jehovah's Witnesses when it attempted to impose a retroactive 60 percent tax on all religious donations made by Jehovah's Witnesses in France between 1993 and 1996. The Court invited the parties to resolve the matter amicably, but because the government maintained that the excessive taxation was not illegal, a friendly settlement was impossible.

In today's decision, the government was ordered to remove "all consequences" of the tax. In addition to returning the 4,590,295 euros (\$5,749,439.50 US approx.) that were confiscated at the time that the taxation was imposed, plus interest, the government is to pay the Witnesses 55,000 euros (\$68,888.64 US approx.) for legal costs and expenses. It is expected that full restitution will also include removing all liens or mortgages from the facilities owned and used by the Witnesses in Louviers.

André Carbonneau, one of the attorneys for the Witnesses who worked on this case, stated: "It is hoped that this decision will encourage the French government to proceed with more restraint and caution in the future before using legal mechanisms such as taxation to restrict the religious freedom of its citizens."

J. R. Brown, a spokesman for the Witnesses at their world headquarters in New York, commented: "Clearly, these efforts by the government of France to financially stop our Bible education work in France did not succeed. We rejoice over this development, along with our fellow believers and other citizens of France who appreciate their right to accept or reject our Christian message."

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