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(Russian)

Witnesses' legal victory in France now final and enforceable

PARIS—Jehovah's Witnesses in France have been informed that the French government has decided not to request a reconsideration by the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) of the landmark decision it handed down on June 30, 2011, against France and in favor of Jehovah's Witnesses. Accordingly, the unanimous decision is now final and enforceable.

The controversy centered on whether the government acted correctly when it issued a demand that the Association of Jehovah's Witnesses in France pay a 60% retroactive tax on religious donations it had received between 1993 and 1996. The government originally sought to obligate the Association to pay 45 million Euros (over \$61,000,000 US) which far exceeded the assets of the Association. By 2011, this demand grew to more than 58 million Euros (over \$82,000,000 US). The ECHR ruled that the government's actions violated the Witnesses' freedom of worship.

"No other major religion in France was subjected to this tax," notes Bruno Faure, a representative of Jehovah's Witnesses in France. "The Court saw that this was not a legitimate effort to collect revenue, but rather an attempt to use taxation as a means of restricting the worship of Jehovah's Witnesses."

The Court's ruling annuls the tax that the government of France sought to impose on the Witnesses. During the next few weeks, representatives of Jehovah's Witnesses and the French government will work to finalize the details of implementing the Court's decision.

"Our desire is to peacefully worship," states Philip Brumley, general counsel for Jehovah's Witnesses at their world headquarters in New York. "And the Court has said that we have this right, just like any other internationally recognized religion."

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