

RUSSIA

Russian Authorities Raid Church Of Scientology In St. Petersburg

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Russia's security service has told Russian news agencies that it raided the Church of Scientology's branch in St. Petersburg as part of a probe into illegal entrepreneurship, extremism, and incitement of hatred.

The June 6 raid on the U.S.-based church comes after Russia's Supreme Court in April issued a ruling banning Jehovah's Witnesses and seizing their property, with the Justice Ministry calling the Christian evangelical movement an "extremist organization."

An Federal Security Service (FSB) spokeswoman said it raided the church's buildings and also the homes of church members.

The FSB said the probe was initially launched into the church's earnings from selling educational materials to new recruits.

The Church of Scientology was first registered officially in Russia in 1994 but the authorities have pursued it through the courts in recent years.

In 2016 the Russian Supreme Court ordered the closure of the Moscow branch of the Church of Scientology.

The Justice Ministry has ruled that a number of the church's publications are extremist and calls the organization a sect.

The Church of Scientology was founded in the United States in 1954 by science-fiction writer L. Ron Hubbard and was accorded the status of a religion there in 1993.

The European Court of Human Rights has twice ruled in favor of the church, saying that Russia violated its rights by refusing to register its churches in various regions.

Prominent Scientologists include Hollywood stars Tom Cruise and John Travolta.

With reporting by Rossia-24 television, AFP, Interfax, and TASS
