



THE EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION OF  
JEHOVAH'S CHRISTIAN WITNESSES

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From The European Association  
of Jehovah's Christian Witnesses

Contribution to the Report of the U.N. High  
Commissioner for Human Rights on the  
implementation of the new review mechanism of the  
Human Rights Council, established by GA Resolution  
60/251 and by the Human Rights Council in Resolution  
5/1 of 18 June 2007 for the 15th session (2013) of the UPR  
(Dates of the WG: January/February 2013).

# SERBIA

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## **BACKGROUND**

After four years of difficulty receiving registration and several lawsuits, on February 8, 2010, Jehovah's Witnesses were registered under the Law on Churches and Religious Communities. By enrolling Jehovah's Witnesses in the Register of Churches and Religious Communities, the Serbian Ministry of Religious Affairs acknowledged the existence and activities of Jehovah's Witnesses in Serbia. However, the ECHR case *JWs v. Serbia* is still pending regarding the continuity of their legal personality between the years 2006 and 2010. In the meantime, the Ministry of Religious Affairs (now the Ministry of Religion and Diaspora) has sent the Serbian Parliament a proposal of an authentic interpretation of the Law on Churches and Religious Communities in order to resolve the issue of recognition of the continuity of smaller religious communities. There were a few incidents of religious intolerance that occurred during the reporting period.

## **ABUSES OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM**

<b>February 27, 2010</b>	<b>Belgrade</b>	<b>Assault/Police Unresponsiveness</b>
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A male Witness was attacked by a young man who stated that the Witnesses were sectarians, and then began kicking and hitting the Witness in the head. After the attack, the Witness went to the hospital and was diagnosed with a broken rib and a number of lesser injuries. The police identified the attacker, but in November 2010, the public prosecutor rejected the criminal complaint and gave the Witness direction to pursue a personal lawsuit in the courts.

<b>July 2008</b>	<b>Jagodina</b>	<b>Assault</b>
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On separate occasions, an orthodox priest verbally and physically attacked (by slapping and kicking) five members of Jehovah's Witnesses Christian Religious Community who were ministering. Although a suit was brought, the criminal case was lost.

<b>June 2008</b>	<b>Bor</b>	<b>Defamation</b>
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In an interview with a local TV station, a local community official accused Jehovah's Witnesses of committing heinous crimes. This was followed by a court action for defamation. In October 2010, the trial court acquitted the defendant.

## **SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION**

<b>October 2011</b>	<b>Leskovac</b>	<b>Assault</b>
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On October 13, 2011 two young men entered the yard of the Kingdom Hall (place of worship of Jehovah's Witnesses). They verbally assaulted one of the Jehovah's Witnesses present, and then they punched him in the face and knocked him to the ground where they both started kicking him. When he called for help, the attackers fled. The victim suffered a broken nose. Police are working on discovering the identities of the perpetrators of this crime.

<b>October 2011</b>	<b>Sremska Mitrovica</b>	<b>Vandalism</b>
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The outer wall of the Kingdom Hall was marked with graffiti with nationalistic content by unknown individuals; the police were informed.

<b>August 2011</b>	<b>Batajnica</b>	<b>Vandalism</b>
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During the night, unknown individuals entered the courtyard of the Kingdom Hall and broke the wooden fence and the gutter on the building and then scattered trash in front of the building.

<b>April 2011</b>	<b>Belgrade</b>	<b>Vandalism</b>
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An unknown group of young men broke several lights at one Kingdom Hall and tried to make Molotov cocktails to cause greater damage.

<b>February 2011</b>	<b>Ruma</b>	<b>Vandalism</b>
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Several young men damaged the fence that protects the Kingdom Hall. The police were notified, but the perpetrators have not been found.

<b>September 2010</b>	<b>Beograd</b>	<b>Libel</b>
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A Belgrade daily newspaper published an article about the notorious murder of a thirteen year old child with a title that alluded to a possible connection to Jehovah's Witnesses. In December 2010, a lawsuit was filed with the Court of First Instance for defamation.

<b>July 2008</b>	<b>Belgrade</b>	<b>Libel</b>
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A professor of neuropsychiatry (and a member of the European Association for the Monitoring of Sects) made false accusations about Jehovah's Witnesses in a newspaper article. A legal action for libel was initiated. The Court of First Instance dismissed the case without opening the proceedings. An appeal was sent to the appellate court. In April 2011 the Court of Appeals upheld the first verdict and dismissed the complaint.

<b>April 2008</b>	<b>Klenak</b>	<b>Assault</b>
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A man verbally attacked two elderly Jehovah's Witness women in public. He took their bags and dumped out their literature. The man was identified and criminal charges were filed.

## **RELIGIOUS FREEDOM OBJECTIVES**

Jehovah's Witnesses in Serbia and as a worldwide organization respectfully request the following of the government of Serbia:

- (1) Diligently search for and prosecute those responsible for violence, vandalism, and other hate crimes against Jehovah's Witnesses and their properties.
- (2) Protect the right to profess one's religious beliefs individually or jointly with others as enshrined in the European Convention on Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.