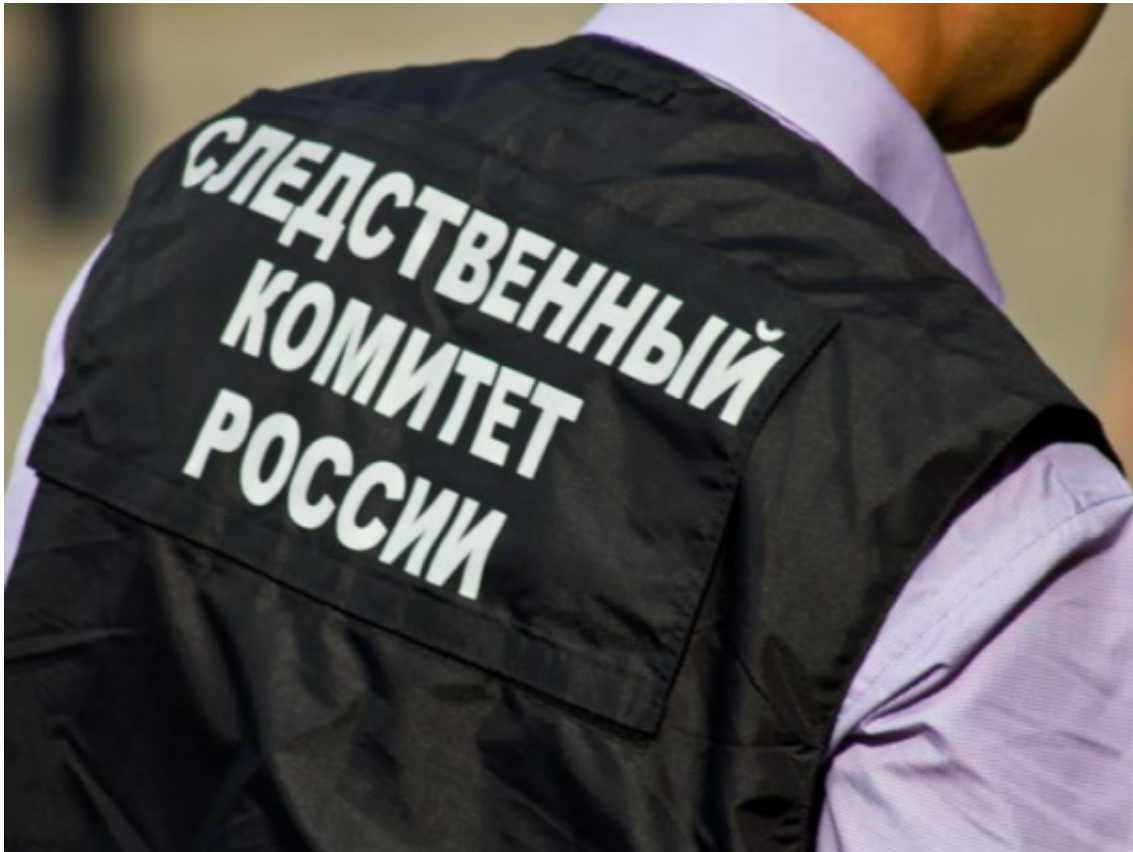


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## 20 participants of a banned religious association to stand trial



The Main Investigative Department of the Investigative Committee of Russia completed an investigation into a criminal case against 20 participants of an extremist organization - a banned religious association of the followers of the faith of Jehovah's Witnesses - a local religious organization of Jehovah's Witnesses in Surgut, Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Area - Ugra. Depending on the role of each, they were charged with committing offenses under Part 1, 2 of Article 282.2, Part 1 of Article 282.3 of the Criminal Code of Russia (organization of an extremist organization and participation in it; financing of an extremist organization).

In April 2017, by decision of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation, the religious organization Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia Management Center and its constituent local religious organizations were liquidated and banned for engaging in extremist activities. However, as the investigation found, despite this, between September 2017 and February 2019 the accused organized the above religious association in the territory of the city of Surgut and Surgut district and took part

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in its activities of an extremist nature. In addition, the defendants collected money to finance a banned organization. At the same time, being aware of the criminality of their actions and wishing to avoid criminal liability, its participants took measures of conspiracy to conceal their activities. In particular, they organized storage of religious literature and official information in electronic form in remote access, used secure means of communication to communicate with each other and carry out preaching activities, and developed protective tactics of communication with law enforcement officials.

During investigation investigators interrogated over 200 witnesses, carried out over 60 forensic examinations, examined over 300 seized items and documents. The criminal case comprised of 222 volumes.

Operational support was provided by the officers of the regional Federal Security Service unit.

The evidence collected was sufficient for an indictment. All probe materials were referred to court to be tried on the merits.

*17 September 2021*

*Page address: <https://en.sledcom.ru/news/item/1610828>*