

105TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

S. CON. RES. 58

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

NOVEMBER 9, 1997

Referred to the Committee on International Relations

CONCURRENT RESOLUTION

Whereas the Russian legislature approved a bill “On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Association”, and Russian President Boris Yeltsin signed it into law on September 26;

Whereas under the new law, the Russian government exercises almost unrestricted control over the activities of both Russian and international religious groups;

Whereas the new law will grant privileged status to some religions while discriminating against others through restrictive reporting and registration requirements;

Whereas the new law jeopardizes religious rights by permitting government officials, in consultation with privileged religious groups, to deny or revoke the registration of minority religions and order their possible disbandment or prohibition, on the basis of such activities as home schooling, nonmedical forms of healing, “hypnotic” sermons, and other vaguely defined offenses;

Whereas the law also restricts foreign missionary work in Russia;

Whereas under the new law, religious organizations or churches that wish to continue their activities in Russia will have to provide confirmation that they have existed at least 15 years, and only those who legally operated 50 years ago may be recognized as national “Russian” religious organizations;

Whereas although Article 14 of the Russian Constitution stipulates that “religious associations are separate from the state and are equal before the law”, Article 19 states that restriction of citizens’ rights on grounds of religious affiliation are prohibited, and Article 28 stipulates that “each person is guaranteed freedom of conscience and freedom . . . to choose, hold, and disseminate religious and other convictions and to act in accordance with them”, the new law clearly violates these provisions of the Russian Constitution;

Whereas the Russian religion law violates accepted international agreements on human rights and religious freedoms to which the Russian Federation is a signatory, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Helsinki Final Act and Madrid and Vienna Concluding Documents, and the European Convention on Human Rights;

Whereas governments have a primary responsibility to promote, encourage, and protect respect for the fundamental and internationally recognized right to freedom of religion; and

Whereas the United States Government is committed to the right to freedom of religion and its policies, and should encourage foreign governments to commit to this principle: Now, therefore, be it—

1 *Resolved by the Senate (the House of Representatives*
2 *concurring)*, That Congress hereby—

3 (1) condemns the newly passed Russian
4 antireligion law restricting freedom of religion, and
5 violating international norms, international treaties
6 to which the Russian Federation is a signatory, and
7 the Constitution of Russia;

8 (2) recommends that President Clinton make
9 the United States position clear to President Yeltsin
10 and the Russian legislature that this antireligion law
11 may seriously harm United States-Russian relations;

12 (3) calls upon President Yeltsin and the Rus-
13 sian legislature to uphold their international commit-
14 ments on human rights, abide by the Russian Con-
15 stitution's guarantee of freedom of religion, and re-
16 consider their position by amending the new
17 antireligion law and lifting all restrictions on free-
18 dom of religion; and

19 (4) calls upon all governments and legislatures
20 of the independent states of the former Soviet Union
21 to respect religious human rights in accordance with

- 1 their international commitments and resist efforts to
- 2 adopt the Russian discriminatory law.

Passed the Senate November 8, 1997.

Attest:

GARY SISCO,
Secretary.