

Moldovan Prosecutors: Unification Church is an “organized criminal group”

EuroReporter
January 19, 2016



<https://www.euroreporter.co/frontpage/2016/01/19/moldova-two-members-of-a-minority-religion-jailed-in-moldova/>

Oleg Savencov and Mihai Calestru, two members of the Unification Church who are in pre-trial detention in Moldova charged with trafficking in human beings, should be “immediately and unconditionally released,” according to Human Rights Without Frontiers and the Forum for Religious Freedom- Europe, two international human rights organizations that have investigated the charges.

The two men were jailed on 30 October 2015, and remain in detention. If convicted of trafficking under Article 165, they face jail terms of six to 12 years.

“Oleg Savencov and Mihai Calestru have not committed the crimes with which they are charged,” according to Willy Fautre, Executive Director of Human Rights Without Frontiers. “The charges against them are based solely on accusations by dissatisfied members of the Unification Church who denounced alleged illegal activities to the authorities. Moreover, we have found no evidence of an objective investigation in this case,” he said.

The Prosecutor’s allegation against the two men is deeply flawed. It claims that they established the Unification Church in Moldova in 2008 as an “organized criminal group.” One of the defendants, Oleg Savencov, is a Ukrainian citizen who entered Moldova only in 2014. Mihai Calestru was never a Church leader.

“Moldova’s anti-trafficking legislation was not meant to be instrumentalized against peaceful religious organizations,” said Dr Aaron Rhodes, President of the Forum for Religious Freedom-Europe.

“It will be a travesty of justice if the law is misused for private reasons, and it will threaten the freedom of religion in Moldova and in Europe,” Rhodes said.

The two international human rights groups said they would bring the case to the attention of authorities in the United Nations, the Council of Europe, the European Union, and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. (OSCE), as well as national governments and the civil society human rights community. They said a conviction would not only be harmful to the defendants and their families and the Unification Church, but to other religious movements and to the image of Moldova.