

MATTERS IN DEVELOPMENT

1. *Discrimination against the Assembly of God Pentecostal Church*

Facts: During the night of March 25, 2007, unidentified individuals set on fire the building owned by the Church and currently reconstructed for future use as the house of worship.

According to eyewitnesses' accounts the arson was premeditated – they heard a popping sound and saw suspicious white packs laid around the building which exploded and set the building roof on fire from all sides. The firemen's guess that the faulty fuse might have caused the fire was not confirmed since there was no electricity in the building. Moreover, the firemen found the place of explosion, traces of acetone and canister with traces of an inflammable substance in the nearby litter bin.

Legal issues: In SCLJ's opinion, the aim of this arson was to intimidate the church members and is directly linked to the court proceedings in relation to this building (see case in "Matters in Appellate Litigation, above) as well as rallies and pickets the Church has been holding over the last year.

Impeding realisation of the right to freedom of religion, breach of equality of rights and freedoms, incitement of hatred or hostility and degrading treatment are all offences punishable under the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation (Articles 148, 136, 282).

Purposeful destruction of or damage to property, if such damage is considerable, is also a criminal offence under article 167 of the Criminal Code.

Status: On March 27, 2007 the leaders of the church turned to the SCLJ for legal help.

On behalf of the Church we sent letters to the Prosecutor General, Mayor of Moscow and President of Russia, asking to settle the situation, cease discrimination and bring perpetrators to justice.

The case is under SCLJ's enhanced control.