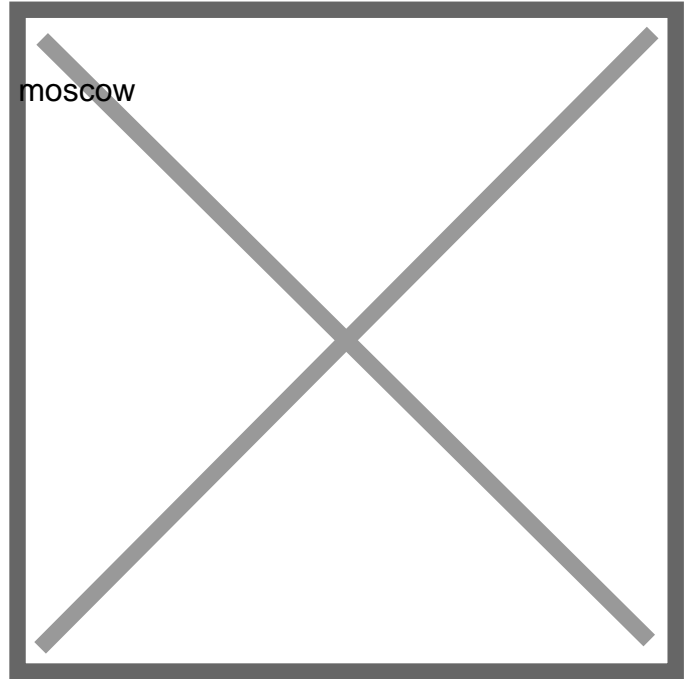


Russian high court overturns Moscow ruling



A SALVATION ARMY band performs in Moscow's Red Square.

Russia's Constitutional Court has ruled in favor of The Salvation Army in Moscow, overturning previous decisions by Moscow's Ministry of Justice and four Moscow courts.

The Army, registered in Moscow since 1992, had applied for re-registration in response to a 1997 change in Russian law, but Moscow officials denied the application on the grounds that it did not fulfill certain requirements in the 1997 legislation.

The Constitutional Court, however, ruled that because The Salvation Army had been registered prior to 1997, it could not be denied re-registration on the basis of new requirements in the 1997 law. The new requirements could only apply to new church applications, not pre-existing ones.

The ruling will also apply to other church groups that had been registered before 1997.

Russia's highest court is the Constitutional Court. It has said that its decision is final and may not be appealed further by Moscow or any other body.

The Army will now re-submit their application to Moscow's Ministry of Justice. "We anticipate a prompt, favorable decision," said Colonel Ken Baillie, Army leader in five east European countries, including Russia. "The Court's decision is clear: we should not be denied re-registration. We trust that city officials will now honor the Court's intent."

The Army will also have to return to two city courts, seeking a review of earlier decisions with regard to liquidation and claims that The Salvation Army is a "military organization" whose members "inevitably" break Russian law.

Colonel Baillie, who has been based in Moscow for four years, welcomed the Court decision. "We are thankful to God that our ministries have not been closed down. We only want to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ and serve suffering humanity. Now we think we can continue in the great city of Moscow, and that is good news indeed."