

Religious freedom survives first Russian test

After President Yeltsin refused to sign a bill that would have restricted foreign missionaries and foreign-based religious organizations in Russia, the Russian legislature recently approved a new version of the bill.

The original bill, which was supported by the Russian Orthodox Church and passed by the Russian legislature in July, was an attempt to control the anticipated flood of churches and sects into Russia following the collapse of Communism. Because its provisions required foreign-based churches to affiliate with a Russian church or else seek state accreditation, the July bill was criticized by religious leaders world-wide as an infringement of religious liberty in Russia.

In a letter to the Russian delegation at the United Nations, Catholic League president Bill Donohue expressed League concerns about the proposed limitations on religious liberty in Russia represented by the July bill.

Although the revised legislation removes some controversial elements of the July bill, questions remain about the extent of governmental limits on foreign religious activity in Russia under the new law, which has been sent back for Yeltsin's signature.