

U.S. Judge Says Russia Acting Like 'Scofflaw'

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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WASHINGTON — A U.S. judge has accused Russia of acting like a "scofflaw" and an "outlaw" by refusing his order to hand over a Jewish group's historical books and documents.

Royce Lamberth, chief judge of the U.S. District Court in Washington, made the comments at a court hearing in a longstanding lawsuit against Russia.

In January, Lamberth slapped Russia with a \$50,000-a-day civil contempt sanction for refusing his earlier order to give the documents, known as the Schneerson library, to Chabad Lubavitch, a Hasidic movement within Orthodox Judaism headquartered in New York.

But the judge
agrees to delay a
Jewish group's

case until Aug.
20 to give time
for talks.

Russia has refused to recognize the authority of the U.S. court and says the documents are state property. The country has transferred some of the documents to the new Jewish Museum in Moscow. Earlier this month, President Vladimir Putin visited the museum and declared: "From this moment, I consider the question of the Schneerson library to be closed."

At a hearing on Thursday, Nathan Lewin, a lawyer for Chabad, said the partial transfer of materials to the museum did not satisfy Chabad's religious needs or the court's order that the materials be returned. But Lewin also noted that there had been negotiations between the U.S. and Russia over the impasse, and he asked for a hearing to be set for Aug. 20 to give those talks a chance to bear fruit.

Lamberth, who granted the request, said Russia "is not willing to obey the laws of the United States, or any other country."

The Russian Embassy declined to comment.

Earlier, Putin had criticized Lamberth's ruling imposing the sanctions, saying "discussion of this problem has taken on elements of confrontation." The Russian Foreign Ministry called the ruling "an absolutely unlawful and provocative decision" and threatened a tough response if U.S. authorities tried to seize Russian property in an attempt to pay for the sanctions.

Russia had earlier halted all art exhibit loans to the U.S., fearing they would be seized and held hostage in the court battle. That's despite Chabad's assurance in court filings that it will not go after any art deemed culturally significant by the State Department, which is the case for major exhibitions. Such art is already protected from legal claims under the Immunity from Seizure Act.

There are two collections at issue: 12,000 religious books and manuscripts seized during the Bolshevik revolution and the Russian Civil War nearly a century ago; and 25,000 pages of handwritten teachings and other writings of religious leaders stolen by Nazi Germany during World War II and then transferred by the Soviet Red Army as war booty to the Russian State Military Archive. The books and manuscripts, some hundreds of years old, record Chabad's core teachings and traditions.

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