

# Press Release

State of Maryland  
Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services



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Secretary

## **Maryland DOC Hosting Russian and Colombian Prison Chaplains At Jessup Correctional Institution**

*Tuesday, February 2, Beginning At 10:30 a.m.*

**TOWSON, MD (January 29, 2010)**---Russia and Colombia, two nations moving toward expanding religious liberties in their prisons, will be visiting a Maryland Division of Correction prison on February 2 to see how DOC runs its religious services and chaplain programs. The group is part of a Prison Fellowship International-organized U.S. visit which will include attending the President's Prayer Breakfast in the nation's capital. The Maryland visit will be at Jessup Correctional Institution (JCI).

The group will hear from Maryland Commissioner of Correction J. Michael Stouffer, JCI Warden John Wolfe, and other DOC leaders; listen to a chaplains' overview by JCI Chaplain Charles Law and others; then take a tour of the maximum-security prison, which houses approximately 1720 men.

The visitors include:

Pat Nolan, Prison Fellowship USA  
Soren Johnson, Prison Fellowship International  
Ivan Sotirov, Prison Fellowship International  
Anatoly Mozgov, Prison Fellowship Russia board member  
Rev. Dmitry Smirnov, Chairman, Russian Orthodox Church Prison Chaplaincy  
Boris Sushkov, Chairman, Prison Fellowship Russia

Bernardo Guerra, President of the Council of Medellin  
Jairo Herran, Municipal Representative  
Lacides Hernandez, Chairman, Prison Fellowship Colombia  
Jairo Moncada, Doctor  
Ana Karina Bisono, Regional Liaison, Prison Fellowship International

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Below is background information on Russia's current prison chaplain situation provided by Prison Fellowship:

*Prison Fellowship Russia, founded in 1991, is the largest prison ministry in Eastern Europe with over 5,000 volunteers. It cooperates closely with the Eastern Orthodox Church and other church partners.*

*Following the fall of the Soviet Union, PF Russia facilitated the delivery of substantial quantities of humanitarian assistance: over 100,000 pieces of warm clothes, 12,000 warm uniforms for the juvenile prisons, four field hospitals, etc.*

*Now PF Russia has developed system-wide programs for the moral and spiritual transformation of prisoners – including concerts, prison libraries, prisoner art competitions, song-writing and performance, and poetry contests. The group was instrumental in the construction or furnishing of hundreds of chapels in the prisons, including over 70 churches.*

*PF Russia maintains excellent relations with the prison administration, and is considered a primary partner among NGOs.*

#### *Opportunities and Challenges*

*The Russian prison system is entering a period of rapid modernization. President Medvedev, himself a jurist, is determined to change the system. As of 2010, alternatives to imprisonment will be widely introduced and implemented. Increased attention will be paid to aftercare, where the role of PF Russia and other civic and religious organizations will increase. Moreover, the Orthodox Church will appoint a number of priests to be full-time chaplains, a first in the post-Soviet period.*

*Rev. Dmitry Smirnov has personally led this push for full-time chaplains. The new Patriarch (Kirill) is showing increased interest in prison ministry, and there are some hopes that a separate synodal department will be established in the near future.*