

# Justice: The regulations may conflict with the criminal law



Secretary Astri Aas Hansen of the Justice Department is concerned about the Jehovah's Witnesses internal regulations.

NRK

**Astrid Aas-Hansen of the Justice Ministry believes Witnesses internal regulations may be in conflict with the criminal law and reminds us that avvergingsplikten is strong in abuse cases.**

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-Avvergingsplikten in criminal law was strengthened in 2010 and includes the duty to prevent criminal acts are violations of confidentiality. Neither religious leaders or doctors exempted from the rule, she said.

NRK.no has put the spotlight on Jehovah's Witnesses internal justice which, according to several sources leads to weak routines notification of child abuse.

regulations led to the abuse of a girl was shut up, struck a devastating verdict firm in California this summer. Instructions and rules from the main office in New York is applied to Jehovah's Witnesses in Norway and in the rest of the world, according NRK.nos sources.

- Jehovah's Witnesses are a worldwide religious community with over 7,650,000 active members.
- According to Statistics Norway there were 11,640 members of Jehovah's Witnesses in Norway in 2010.
- Faith communities are led by Jehovah's Witnesses Governing Council, which is seven older men in Brooklyn, New York.
- Jehovah's Witnesses call themselves Christians. Their doctrine is based on their understanding of the Bible, and they use the New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures.
- Most believe Armageddon or doomsday is imminent.
- Jehovah's Witnesses believe they can get to Paradise when the end time is reached. Being a member of the Jehovah's Witnesses are not a guarantee

## Do you have tips or suggestions for this issue? Contact NRK journalists here

In a secret rulebook called "Shepherd the flock of God" strikes Witnesses stated that if there are at least two witnesses to "an outrage" the matter shall be dead. According to sources, it is precisely this practice that is because even when it comes to sexual assault.

This legislation responds to the Justice Department on:

**- If you have a suspicion that a child is abused, then one should go to the police. In criminal law it says you have a duty to prevent abuses, beats Aas-Hansen stated.**

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**- Can be punished for not reporting**

Aas-Hansen comes with a clear call to action:

- If you have suspicions of child abuse and it shall be reported to the police. In the worst case, one can be punished for not notifying. Child abuse is very serious crime that can have major consequences for the child concerned, she says.

- *What should be done when you know they have such rules?*

**- You should make it clear to everyone that they have a duty to prevent such offenses against children are committed. People must be aware that the rule is known and that it is followed. I encourage anyone who has kids to do that they have a particular attention towards these issues.**

- *Will you make anything?*

- It's too early to tell, but I am concerned when I hear about this legislation Jehovah's Witnesses have been prepared keeping in mind that it is not that it shall be reported to the police, and that there shall be instituted an internal matter if there are two witnesses to a crime. Generally there is no witnesses to child abuse, so if it is used it means that you do not focus on these issues, says Aas Hansen.

## Save the Children: - It takes a lot of abuse uncovered in closed environments

- The insulation in one environment, with small closed groups where high loyalty prevails, make it takes a lot of abuse is revealed, and it decreases and the chance that the child speak up, says advisor Kaja Hegg of Save the Children.

She was coordinator for Go-On project in the early 2000's, which charted kids who had broken out of the isolated religious communities. She has worked regularly with the problem since.

Hegg stressed that she did not know the specific cases of abuse in the Jehovah's Witnesses.

- There is a high degree of social control in closed communities, and abuse made invisible and ties. The threats from providing notice of abuse seems stronger in such environments. Even if there is a problem regardless of sexual assault, the threat of extra power that they risk being ostracized. Taboos around becomes much stronger, says Hegg.

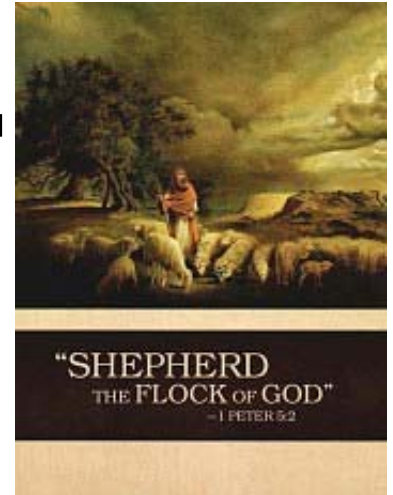
**- Fewer children look in the cards**

Hegg believes that when children live in isolated communities, there are fewer who see children in the cards.

to get to paradise. It must work to get there.

■ Jehovah's Witnesses are perhaps best known for his preaching activities, as they go from door to door with information about Jehovah's Witnesses. The goal of the ministry is that more people will find what they call the truth. (

Source: Norwegian Encyclopedia, Wikipedia, SSB)



The secret rule book 'oldest' book provides guidelines for how the abuse to be dealt with in the Jehovah's Witnesses.

*Photo: Screen shot*

- **"Normal" children live an active social life at various venues where they meet various adults, which may have knowledge of such things and alert. I am thinking of older executives and other child trust.**

Witnesses appear to be correct and behave accordingly without, think Hegg.

- It makes it difficult for schools and support agencies to get in touch with them and detect abuse and neglect. It's really important to focus on this for the outside world, says Hegg.

**- A misunderstanding**

Spokesperson of Jehovah's Witnesses reject the religious community violates avvergingsplikten.

- *How do the Jehovah's Witnesses to the avvergingsplikten prevail confidentiality faiths?*

- **Jehovah's Witnesses go immediately to the police if and when allegations of sexual abuse of minors is known to the church or its officers, says Frisvold.**

- *Ministry of Justice suggests that human practices described in the oldest book may be in violation of avvergingsplikten. What do you say to that?*

- There must be a misunderstanding. We have previously ensured that the Justice Department and other agencies have received information from us in a significant way clarifies that Jehovah's Witnesses fully recognize and act in accordance with Norwegian law in this area.

**- Highlighting through courses and correspondence**

- *Can you demonstrate tangible, embodied in writing or otherwise rendered wording in their rules that say that you should go to the police on suspicion of assault?*

- **It will be done regularly. For example, during regular courses for officers in the churches, by the visit of travel agents in all parishes and through letters. Such a letter was sent in October to the officers of the church, says Frisvold and elaborates:**

- There it was again emphasized that here in Norway are required to go to the police if and when one becomes aware of allegations of sexual abuse against minors. "Many countries, including Norway ... imposes overseers in the church to notify the authorities about an accusation of this."

NRK.no seen Frisvold letter refers. It's not that the police should be notified. It should be noted however that some countries have laws that require that authorities be notified, but still refer to the paragraph rule book where it says that a "crime" requires two witnesses.

**Excerpts from the letter:**

"Most states have child-abuse reporting laws that, Depending on the facts, mandate el-ders to report an accusation to the Authorities. Thus, when elders learn of an accusation of child abuse, two elders from their



Kaja Hegg of Save the Children.  
Photo: Save the Barnabvg



Tom Frisvold is press contact in the Jehovah's Witnesses.  
Photo: Bjorn Mikkelsen / Enebakk newspaper

Congregation should immediately call the Legal Department for legal advice. In addition, the elders should investigate every Allegations of child sexual abuse. When elders learn of an accusation, in addition to this letter, they should carefully review the direction outlined in the shepherding textbook »

Excerpts from letters sent to all parishes 1 October 2012

The entire rule book of Jehovah's Witnesses is attached as a file in the article.

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