

As Judges Are Badgered, 13 Ask Police for Help

By [Natalya Krainova](#)

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Working as a judge is a dangerous job, with 13 Moscow judges seeking police protection since January and the city's top judge receiving threats, the top judge, Olga Yegorova, said Tuesday.

"For the first time in many years, threats have been directed against me," Yegorova told a packed news conference of about 45 reporters and several television channels, including Channel One, TV Center and Ren-TV.

Yegorova refused a question by The Moscow Times to elaborate on the time and essence of the threats. "Life is not easy for me as it is, but you are curious," she said, testily. "When I get killed, probably everyone will be curious."

Yegorova, chairwoman of the Moscow City Court, said in an interview on the sidelines of the news conference that 13 judges had sought police protection since the start of the year. She did not appear to be among the 13, with a court spokeswoman explaining that the judges had

complained to their direct superiors and Yegorova. Several hundred judges work under Yegorova.

Yegorova also said she had not received complaints about law enforcement and government officials putting pressure on city judges. But she suggested that some judges were not acting independently, saying she had "information that some judges are biased."

A few years ago, former Moscow judges Alexander Melikov and Olga Kudeshkina accused Yegorova of pushing for their ouster after they refused to bow to pressure from prosecutors for harsher sentences.

Yegorova has denied wrongdoing.

Yegorova said Tuesday that city courts rule in favor of City Hall in 70 percent of cases where Muscovites appeal their decrees.

She refused to comment on why Mayor Yury Luzhkov, who was celebrating his 74th birthday in Austria on Tuesday, almost never loses defamation lawsuits filed in city courts, proposing instead that journalists "wish him a happy birthday."

Yegorova complained that some Muscovites got the wrong impression about courts from fictitious television shows, causing them to "ask for a case to be considered the same way judge Astakhov did it." Children's ombudsman and prominent lawyer Pavel Astakhov hosts a television show called "Chas Suda" (Justice Hour) on Ren-TV on weekday mornings.

In an attempt to educate the public, she said, Moscow judges will explain how they consider cases on a new weekly television show called "Moskovskoye Delo" (Moscow Case), which started airing Sunday on Channel One.

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