

Teenage Monastery Boarders 'Abused'

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Prosecutors promised on Wednesday to investigate complaints by three teenage boarders at a Russian Orthodox monastery that their teachers beat them with belts and made them eat salt as punishment.

The Public Chamber and children's ombudsman Pavel Astakhov also vowed to conduct checks into the allegations against the Vladimir region's Svyato-Bogolyubsky Monastery — even though similar complaints produced no changes last year.

Raisa Loiko, the mother of one of the teens, said the boarders were often beaten with belts and forced to do up to 500 bows as punishment, Izvestia [reported](#) Wednesday. They were also forced to do agricultural labor from dawn until dusk, she said.

Loiko's daughter, Marina, said she was made to eat a mug of salt once, and was doled out 103 belt strokes on another occasion, the report said.

Children were housed at the monastery because their mothers intended to become nuns there,

Public Chamber member Lyubov Dukhanina told The Moscow Times on Wednesday.

Another boarder at the monastery, Valentina Perova, 16 at the time, wrote an open letter to President Dmitry Medvedev, Prosecutor General Yury Chaika and Patriarch Kirill in 2009, accusing teachers of abuse, Izvestia said.

Prosecutors and a commission acting on Russian Orthodox Patriarch Kirill's orders looked into the complaint, but no criminal cases were opened and the scandal dissipated after several teens were transferred to neighboring Suzdal's Yeparkhinalnaya Orthodox boarding school.

A spokesman for the Moscow Patriarchate declined to comment on the issue when reached by telephone Wednesday.

Prosecutors pledged to intervene. "We will definitely look into the information reported by the Izvestia newspaper," said a spokeswoman for the Prosecutor General's Office, Interfax reported.

Public Chamber records indicate that the Vladimir boarding house was supposed to be closed, Dukhanina said by telephone. But she conceded that it was difficult to verify the information because of the closed nature of the establishment.

Izvestia confirmed reports about the boarding house's closure but said children were still housed in sketes, or hermit communities, located by the monastery and linked with it. "We are taking the situation under our control," Dukhanina said.

Dukhanina said existing laws do not cover establishments for children run by monasteries and added that it was time to amend the legislature.

"They are not considered educational institutions or state facilities, which makes the law not applicable for them," she said.

The three teens who lodged the latest complaint — two of whom are minors, which prompted Izvestia to withhold their surnames — are now also staying at the Suzdal school but said about 10 girls remained at the Vladimir monastery.

The Suzdal school has faced harsh checks from local officials after sheltering Vladimir runaways, Izvestia reported.

One of the minors, identified only as Stepan, told Izvestia that monastery representatives had attempted to kidnap him from Suzdal but were stopped by security guards.

The teens also said they misled the investigators looking into Perova's report last year.

"We realized that we let down many other children by lying to the patriarch's commission last year," said the other minor, Ksenia. She cited "cowardice" as the reason for the lie.

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