

Justice Ministry Pledges Clearer NGO Rules

By [Alexander Bratersky](#)

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Inmates dismantling old cars at a prison outside Krasnoyarsk on Monday. Prison reforms are planned this year. **Ilya Naymushin**

The Justice Ministry, notorious for refusing registration to anti-Kremlin groups, has promised clearer registration rules for nongovernmental organizations and called for increased public control over prisons.

NGOs should be guaranteed "qualified and lawful decisions" when applying for registration, Justice Minister Alexander Kononov said Monday at a round table dedicated to his ministry's 2010 work and plans for this year.

"This is also very important on the eve of national [State Duma] and presidential elections," he said.

He did not identify any groups that had failed to obtain registration.

His ministry has denied registration to all prominent opposition leaders seeking to establish parties to run for the Duma, including Eduard Limonov, Sergei Udaltsov and the liberal quadrumvirate of Mikhail Kasyanov, Vladimir Milov, Boris Nemtsov and Vladimir Ryzhkov.

Konovalov said refusals often have to do with the "corruption factor." He did not elaborate.

"We shouldn't split hairs but should react properly," he said.

More than 71,000 registration requests were submitted to the ministry in 2010 by NGOs, religious groups and political parties, the ministry said in a statement Monday. It said the number of requests grew 18.5 percent year on year, but did not specify how many were approved.

Speaking on the prison system, Konovalov said "civil society's control over the penitentiary system should be more widespread."

He said groups comprising businesspeople, public figures and clergy should have a say on which convicts get released on parole — currently a corruption-ridden practice believed to allow prison officials to rake in huge bribes.

Deputy Justice Minister Alexander Smirnov said the ministry was collaborating with the Health and Social Development Ministry to allow ill inmates to be admitted into hospitals outside the prison system.

The ministry is reforming the prison health care system after the death of Hermitage Capital lawyer Sergei Magnitsky, who died of health problems in pretrial detention in 2009.

The Prosecutor General's Office reported last week that 4,423 people died in custody last year, a 9 percent increase from 2009, [Gazeta.ru reported](#).

Among the Justice Ministry's other activities last year, it examined 3,700 bills and found corruption loopholes in 4 percent of them and ordered the deportation of about 5,000 foreigners, many of whom were released after serving prison sentences.

The ministry was also involved in the defense of cases filed against Russia in the European Court of Human Rights, submitting about 1,300 memorandums with the Strasbourg-based court.

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