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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Extradition Manual Introduced

By Alexandra Odynova

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Rights groups presented on Thursday the first-ever guidebook for people facing unlawful extradition from Russia — which is known for its readiness to hand over fugitive activists to oppressive Central Asian regimes.

The 160-page Russian-language manual, created by the Institute of Human Rights with the assistance of the UN Refugee Agency, is intended for the use of lawyers, not their clients, and offers tips on Russia's extremely convoluted extradition laws, the authors said at the presentation in Moscow.

"Over the past few years there has been a growing number of extraditions of people prosecuted on illegal political or religious charges," said rights defender Yelena Ryabibina, the manual's author.

There were only six such cases in 2008, but now at least 18 are ongoing, she said. Most cases stem from post-Soviet Central Asian states — Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan — but Belarus, also notorious for its human rights record,

contributes as well.

Extradition in these situations often means torture and long-term jailing for suspects, but Russian authorities prefer to ignore this, looking to preserve friendly relations with the country's former satellites, said rights champion Svetlana Ganushkina. Even the fact that wanted activists often have dual citizenship and are Russian citizens does not help, she said.

Moreover, the Russian legal system has little experience in handling complicated extradition cases, which leads to violations, lawyers said. In particular, people are sometimes handed over to other countries before they could appeal the extradition.

"A new wave of cases involves Central Asians who don't speak Russian," said Yelena Korneva, a St. Petersburg-based lawyer who has also worked on the manual.

The language barrier allows law enforcement agencies to manipulate suspects, Korneva said.

She said one of her clients spent two months in custody believing he was detained as an illegal migrant, while in fact he was pending extradition to Uzbekistan on political charges. The extradition was stopped only on an appeal to the European Court of Human Rights, which, Korneva said, is often required to resolve in such cases.

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