

Foreign Ministry Raps U.S. Rights Report

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The Foreign Ministry said last week's U.S. State Department report criticizing Moscow's human rights record reflected double standards and was politicized.

"As before, the document has unfortunately become obvious evidence of the use of 'double standards' and the politicization of human rights issues by the United States," the ministry said in a statement posted on its web site.

President Dmitry Medvedev, who was steered into the Kremlin by his predecessor Vladimir Putin in 2008, has promised to build civil society and improve Russia's traditionally poor human rights record, but few tangible results have been seen so far.

Washington scolded Russia for "governmental and societal human rights problems and abuses during the year" in its annual report on human rights published globally last week, echoing Washington's previous remarks and sparking a rebuke from Moscow in return.

"Americans prefer not to recall their own record [of violations]," the Foreign Ministry statement said, adding that Washington has recently resorted to disproportionate use of force in Iraq and Afghanistan, causing civilian casualties.

"Odious special prisons in Guantanamo and Bagram are still functioning, despite promises to shut them down," the statement said Monday. "The United States remains the largest player in the market of human trafficking ... and the world's leader in child porn consumption."

The U.S. report said the Russian government infringed on freedom of expression, assembly and association, detaining certain demonstrators and pressuring select nongovernmental organizations, independent media, some religious minorities, independent labor unions and political opposition.

The report also recalled last year's Moscow court verdict that jailed former Yukos CEO Mikhail Khodorkovsky must stay in jail until 2017, and the 2009 death of lawyer Sergei Magnitsky in a Moscow pretrial detention center, which U.S. Vice President Joe Biden last month called a "fundamental obstacle" for investors.

Last year's severe beating of Kommersant journalist and blogger Oleg Kashin was also mentioned in the report, amid more than 19 unsolved murders of journalists in Russia since 2000, according to the New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists.

The U.S. report said the conflict between the government and insurgents, Islamist militants and criminals in the North Caucasus led to numerous human rights violations by all parties, who reportedly engaged in killing, torture, abuse, violence and abductions.

In February, the UN human rights chief said attempts to improve civil society by Medvedev, who styled himself a champion of democracy, had fallen short and urged Russia to take action to improve its record.

Medvedev and U.S. President Barack Obama have made a series of moves to "reset" the relationship in the past years after a period of tension, signing a crucial nuclear arms treaty earlier this year.

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