

Nurgaliyev Vows to 'Burn' Any Guilty Cops Linked to Magnitsky

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Police gathering near Red Square to patrol Russia Day festivities in June. Nurgaliyev says graft is deep-rooted. **Igor Tabakov**

DUSHANBE, Tajikistan — Interior Minister Rashid Nurgaliyev promised to burn "with a red-hot iron" any police officers who gained illicit wealth and were involved in the prosecution of Hermitage Capital lawyer Sergei Magnitsky.

"If something is proved beyond a doubt, I will burn them with a red hot iron myself," Nurgaliyev said in an interview Saturday in the Tajik capital, Dushanbe. At the moment, "we can't charge them with anything."

Prosecutors opened an investigation into two prison officials, including a doctor, over Magnitsky's death in July, two months after President Dmitry Medvedev said all guilty parties in the lawyer's "tragic" passing should be punished.

Magnitsky, who was 37 when he died of heart failure in 2009, said he was abused and denied medical care while in custody to force him to drop allegations of a \$230 million tax fraud by Interior Ministry officials. He spent almost a year in pretrial detention.

"The failure to provide Magnitsky with adequate medical treatment was a direct cause of his death," the Investigative Committee said in July, citing the results of a medical probe.

Nurgaliyev also said it might take years to eliminate police corruption despite a Kremlin overhaul of the police force, the biggest since the end of the Soviet Union.

"If you only knew what we started from," he said. "Many officers were racketeering. For example, I come to you, and you have a police order to provide documentation. I tell you to give me 50 percent, and I'll sort it out. Many fraudsters created such a scheme. It's disgusting."

Many senior officers were dismissed for false declaration of incomes, Nurgaliyev said.

"Some officers in the south registered businesses to spouses and then fictitiously divorced them," he said.

Since March 1, 143 senior officers have been fired, according to comments by Sergei Naryshkin, head of the presidential administration, posted on the Kremlin web site July 29.

The changes at the police are superficial, Natalya Taubina, director of the Public Verdict Foundation, said Monday by telephone.

"We see very little decrease in the number of people who have been tortured or beaten up," she said.

Russians paid at least 164 billion rubles (\$5.6 billion) in bribes last year to buy off teachers, traffic policemen and others in "everyday" situations, almost double the level in 2001, the Economic Development Ministry said June 14.

The police overhaul also envisages a reduction in staff numbers by about 20 percent, equivalent to more than 200,000 officers. Under the changes, police officers will receive larger salaries to deter bribe taking.

Magnitsky's widow on Tuesday rejected summons from the Investigative Committee for interview in a tax evasion case against her late husband, Interfax reported.

Natalya Zharikova's position on the case has already been put into writing, her lawyer Dmitry Kharitonov said.

"We will send a related letter in the near future. ... I don't think we would want to go there," he said.

Magnitsky's mother has denounced the case as "immoral."

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