

Elections Watchdog Golos Forced Out of Office Building

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Independent election-monitoring group Golos is moving its Moscow office after its landlord demanded that the group cancel its rental contract early, a move Golos calls illegal, RIA-Novosti reported Wednesday.

The elections watchdog announced last month that its landlord, publishing house Literaturnaya Gazeta, had demanded that the organization leave the building by Feb. 1, despite the fact that Golos' rental contract was set to expire only in August 2012. Golos requested until March 1 to find a new office, but the publishing house refused and sent a letter indicating they wanted the space occupied by Golos vacated by Feb. 15 to make room for "new projects."

Golos is Russia's only independent election-monitoring group. The organization came under pressure from authorities in the lead-up to the State Duma elections in December, getting hit with a fine in connection with a Web site it ran that recorded alleged elections violations. Its director was also temporarily detained at Sheremetyevo Airport days before the vote.

Golos director Grigory Melkonyants said the organization is now in the process of moving its

Moscow operations to a temporary office and that they will sue Literaturnaya Gazeta.

"We understand that the situation is becoming strained, that we cannot be here — tomorrow they won't let us into the office," Melkonyants said, RIA-Novosti reported.

"We're going to be in court for a long time, but at the same time there won't be any access to our desks at all. We were forced to move, what's more illegally," he said.

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