

Amnesty International Decries NGO Law 1 Year On

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Scores of nongovernmental organizations have run afoul of a law that tightened the screws on independent civil activity in the country when it took effect a year ago, human rights group Amnesty International said Wednesday.

Part of legislation that appeared after Vladimir Putin's return to the presidency, the law entered into force Nov. 21 last year and requires NGOs to register as "foreign agents" if they receive foreign funding and engage in what is loosely defined as "political activity."

Amnesty International said that at least 15 NGOs across Russia have been taken to court over the law, and that 37 NGOs have been officially warned they would be in violation if they continue their operations.

"One year after it came into force, the record of the foreign agents law is a grim one," said John Dalhuisen, the organization's program director for Europe and Central Asia.

The legislation prompted hundreds of unscheduled inspections of organizations across the country after its adoption, with many activists complaining that the checks greatly hindered their work and scared off donors and potential partners.

Dalhuisen said the law was designed to stigmatize NGOs engaged in human rights, election monitoring, environmental issues and discrimination, including against LGBT people.

"It is providing a perfect pretext for fining and closing critical organizations and will cut often vital funding streams," Dalhuisen said.

He said authorities had inspected more than 1,000 NGOs and several of the most prominent human rights groups had to pay fines, with some being forced to close.

Golos, Russia's only independent elections watchdog, was the first organization to be hit with a fine in connection with the law, ordered to pay 300,000 rubles (\$9,260) by Moscow's Basmany District Court in early June.

The Justice Ministry later suspended its activities until December.

This week alone, five NGOs in Moscow — Memorial, Public Verdict, For Human Rights, Jurix and Golos — were in court over pressure put on them by the authorities in connection with the “foreign agents” law, the statement said.

Critics of the “foreign agent” law have said it carries echoes of the Cold War and threatens to trigger a new wave of emigration to the West. Many say the term “foreign agent” can be construed as entailing spying or treachery.

The Kremlin has denied that the law is part of a crackdown and said it was meant to prevent “foreign meddling” in Russia’s domestic affairs.

President Vladimir Putin said in June that organizations engaging in domestic political activity and receiving foreign funding simply needed to “register in a certain way and then they are free to go ahead with their work.”

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