

Russia's Human Rights Climate Worst in Decade – NGO

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Kenneth Roth, the international NGO's executive director

The human rights landscape in Russia has deteriorated beyond recognition in the last decade with critics silenced and labeled as spies and minorities discriminated against, Human Rights Watch said at a news conference in Moscow on Thursday.

"Starting in the early 2000s many in Russia have been wary about increasing pressure on critics, but now there is full alarm about autocratic rule," said Kenneth Roth, the international NGO's executive director, during his first visit to Russia since May 2005. "The rights retrenchment has been most pronounced following Vladimir Putin's return to the Kremlin in 2012."

Roth was denied a Russian visa in 2008 at a consulate in New York, where the organization is headquartered.

Human Rights Watch singled out the law labeling foreign-funded political NGOs as "foreign agents," a term widely associated with spies, as a sign of the deteriorating situation.

In addition, the recently passed amendments limiting foreign ownership of media companies risk stifling the remaining independent media outlets, the NGO said in a statement.

Human Rights Watch also said the Russian government has embraced discrimination against the LGBT community by introducing the so-called gay propaganda law that bans the promotion of non-traditional sexual relationships to minors.

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