

Hundreds of Russian NGOs Penalized Last Year Amid Government Crackdown

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The Justice Ministry in Moscow.

Russia's Justice Ministry fined more than 200 nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) last year for violating legislation regulating their activities, Russian media reported Tuesday.

Fined an average of 10,600 rubles (\$180), 203 NGOs and 85 NGO directors were ordered to pay the Justice Ministry a total of 3,054,000 rubles (\$52,000) last year, according to a document published on the ministry's website. Of the total amount fined, the authorities have received only 818,000 rubles (\$14,000), the ministry said.

Last year, the Justice Ministry conducted some 7,000 planned and surprise inspections of NGOs, issuing nearly 37,000 warnings to the country's various nongovernmental organizations. The ministry plans to conduct 6,296 inspections on NGOs this year, the report said.

As of Jan. 1, there were 223,605 registered NGOs operating in Russia, according to the Justice Ministry. As of Tuesday, 49 Russian NGOs were listed on the ministry's "foreign agents" register.

In 2012, Russia adopted legislation requiring NGOs that receive foreign funding and engage in loosely defined "political" activity to voluntarily register as "foreign agents" with the Justice Ministry.

The Russian government launched a nationwide campaign of NGO inspections in 2013. According to Human Rights Watch, at least 55 organizations were warned not to violate the "foreign agents" legislation and at least 20 others were ordered to register with the Justice Ministry during the campaign.

Last year, the legislation was amended to allow the ministry to impose the "foreign agent" label on NGOs that haven't opted to voluntarily register as such.

Moscow's Sakharov Center, a human rights organization named after Soviet dissident Andrei Sakharov, said Monday that it had received a 300,000 ruble (\$5,200) fine from a Moscow court for failing to register as a "foreign agent" with the Justice Ministry. The center, which hosted the wake of assassinated Kremlin critic Boris Nemtsov earlier this month, said it would appeal the court's decision.

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