

Foreign Anti-Torture Experts Expelled From Russia

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The German citizen was taking part in a seminar in the Russian city of Nizhny Novgorod.

Foreign experts from Germany and Latvia who were taking part in a seminar organized by a Russian anti-torture NGO have been ordered to leave Russia for violating migration rules, the RIA Novosti news agency reported Thursday.

One more foreign expert, from Denmark, is still to face a court ruling over his participation in the event run by the Nizhny Novgorod-based Committee Against Torture after immigration officials interrupted the seminar in a local hotel.

Academics and specialists from abroad have been alarmed by an uptick in the number of deportations over alleged violations of migration rules in recent months as Russia's standoff with the West appears to be prompting greater efforts to exert control over foreigners inside the country.

A German national was ordered to leave Russia and fined 2,000 rubles (\$40) on Wednesday evening, Interfax reported, citing a lawyer from the Committee Against Torture. A court imposed the same punishment on the Latvian expert whose court appearance was the following day, RIA Novosti reported Thursday.

The three experts were from the Danish Institute Against Torture, an international group working with victims of torture.

“They were traveling in good faith and the trip was publicly announced. ... As far as I know they applied for a work visa and received one,” Anders Bernhoft, a spokesman for the Danish Institute Against Torture, told The Moscow Times.

The trip was the first time the group had sent experts to Russia in recent years, said Bernhoft.

The prominent Committee Against Torture became entangled in a recent high-profile conflict with Chechen strongman leader Ramzan Kadyrov and was labeled a “foreign agent” earlier this year under a controversial 2012 law that stigmatizes NGOs receiving funding from abroad. The human rights group, set up in 2000, has publicly said that it will not operate under the Soviet-era label.

A spokesman for the Committee Against Torture did not respond to repeated calls to his mobile phone Thursday.

Instances of foreign experts being deported for allegedly breaking migration rules have increased in recent months.

Last fall, immigration authorities interrupted two seminars in St. Petersburg and subsequently fined and deported several U.S. students taking part in one of the events, while U.S. professors taking part in the other were barred from resuming the workshop on the basis that they were all in the country on the wrong kind of visa.

Migration service officials appear to be particularly zealous in Nizhny Novgorod, a city about 400 kilometers east of Moscow. Last month, a British academic using archives in the city was deported and labeled a “spy” by Russian tabloids for allegedly breaking the terms of her visa.

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