

Labeled as 'Foreign Agent,' Russian NGO Committee Against Torture Shuts Its Doors

By [Daria Litvinova](#)

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Being labeled as a "foreign agent" does not require an organization to close.

Russian human rights organization the Committee Against Torture has formally decided to close its doors, citing its refusal to accept the label of "foreign agent," the Novaya Gazeta newspaper reported.

A 2012 law relegates NGOs that receive funding from abroad and that are seen as politically active to a list of "foreign agents," a term traditionally associated in Russia with espionage.

Being labeled as a "foreign agent" does not require an organization to close. However, they must openly display their status, and are subjected to heightened scrutiny and increased government inspections.

After the Committee Against Torture was ordered to register as a "foreign agent," it

challenged the decision.

But a Nizhny Novgorod court held on July 8 said the organization must comply and accept the label.

It was then that Committee Against Torture chairman Igor Kalyapin decided to pursue liquidation rather than accept the label, current affairs magazine Slon reported at the time.

On Friday, a majority of the NGO's members voted in favor of its liquidation, formalizing the process, the opposition-leaning Novaya Gazeta reported.

Immediately following the vote, the Committee Against Torture was required to cease all of its work, Kalyapin explained in comments to the newspaper. A liquidation commission will take the reins from this point forward, he said.

"To finalize the decision to liquidate [the organization], we'll have to determine what to do with its property and remaining funds. I'll have the documents [regarding both issues] ready by Monday," Kalyapin was cited by Novaya Gazeta as saying.

The Ministry of Justice will be notified about the liquidation within three days, he said, and on July 28 a press conference will be held in order to explain how the members of the committee plan to continue working to defend civil rights.

Earlier this month another NGO — prominent science foundation Dynasty — closed its doors after being ordered by the authorities to register as a "foreign agent," and was ordered to pay a fine of 300,000 rubles (\$5,600) for failing to do so.

Contact the author at d.litvinova@imedia.ru

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