

Russian NGO Files for Bankruptcy Following 'Foreign Agent' Fines

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The human rights organization Committee Against Torture has filed for bankruptcy after being slapped with fines totaling 900,000 rubles (\$14,000) for refusing to register as a “foreign agent,” the public organization's chairman was quoted by Russian media as saying.

The NGO, which announced in July it had decided to close down operations rather than accept the “foreign agent” label, does not have the money to pay the fines, its chairman Igor Kalyapin said, the Interfax news agency reported Monday.

“No new funds are coming, nor could they possibly be coming to the accounts of the Committee Against Torture, which is in the process of liquidation,” Kalyapin was quoted as saying. “We have no assets — everything has been sold. Moreover, we owe wages — we have been unable to settle debts to several employees.”

A recent Russian law requires all nongovernmental organizations that receive foreign funding and engage in vaguely defined political activity to register as “foreign agents” — a term dating back to the Soviet era, when it was widely used to signify espionage.

As Russia's relations with the West have deteriorated, the Justice Ministry has been widely applying the law. A number of prominent NGOs have chosen to shut their doors rather than bear the “foreign agent” label.

In separate rulings, Russian courts imposed three fines of 300,000 rubles each on the Committee Against Torture for its failure to register as a “foreign agent,” Interfax reported.

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