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Moscow Mayor Accuses Kiosks of Illegally Obtained Property Rights

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Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyanin

The owners of the street shopping pavilions subject to demolition have no right to hide behind ownership rights that have been obtained illegally, Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyanin wrote on his VKontakte social network page.

The demolition of the buildings — that City Hall claims lack necessary legal paperwork — is "a good example of the fact that truth, heritage and history of our country cannot be sold in Russia," Sobyanin said in a post late Wednesday. "You cannot hide behind property papers clearly acquired illegally."

He called for the return to Moscow's "open, beautiful, beloved" squares and streets.

Sobyanin commented on the large-scale campaign by City Hall's to demolish over 100 kiosks and small shopping centers near central Moscow metro stations that started Monday night.

The move caused anger among the owners and tenants of the trade premises.

The entrepreneurs claim the demolition is being done illegally and that they possess all necessary property rights.

The mayor did not cite any example of illicit ownership of business pavilions in his social media post. Sobyanin's spokeswoman Gulnara Penkova also did not specify the grounds for such allegations, redirecting queries to Moscow's state real estate inspectorate.

All actions by the authorities have been legal, she told The Moscow Times on Thursday.

“Who are these swindlers who gave permission — it is the responsibility of other bodies — law enforcement bodies,” Penkova said.

Earlier this week, the mayor said in post that the demolished premises were built mainly in the '90s with the silent agreement or assistance of officials.

The City Hall's crackdown on kiosks and pavilions has been supported by the Kremlin. “These hellholes have nothing to do with so-called small businesses, because, as a rule, they serve as breeding grounds for crime and unsanitary conditions. Any business, whether small or large, must first be civilized,” presidential administration head Sergei Ivanov was quoted as saying by the RIA Novosti news agency on Thursday.

According to Ivanov, many owners of these trade premises received only temporary permission.

In addition to business owners, a number of politicians have condemned the authorities' move. Sergei Mitrokhin, leader of the Russian opposition party Yabloko, asked President Vladimir Putin to stop the demolition of kiosks and demanded for Sobyanin's dismissal.

Communist party deputy Valery Rashkin called for checking that government authorities held the necessary permissions for the demolition of the commercial stalls.

Meanwhile, the recent wave of demolitions is likely to continue.

According to the head of Moscow's trade and services department Alexei Nemeryuk, City Hall is planning to extend the list of trade premises subject to demolition.

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