

Russian Justice System to Reintroduce Forced Labor in 2017

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Maxim Stulov / Vedomosti

The Russian prison system is to reintroduce forced labor in 2017, the TASS news agency reported Tuesday.

Speaking in an interview with the news agency, Deputy Director of Russia's Federal Penitentiary Service, Valery Maximenko, said that four new correctional centers and seven other facilities, hosting almost 900 prisoners in total, would open on Jan 1 next year.

Correctional labor was included in the Russian criminal codex as an applicable form of punishment in December 2011 with its implementation being postponed due to delays in the building of the facilities.

During the interview, Maximenko praised correctional labor for “not completely isolating prisoners from society” and compared the conditions of living and working in correctional facilities to those of “shift workers” who live “far from home in shared accommodation.”

Maximenko also emphasized that it was “nonsense” to suggest the reintroduction of forced labor was a return to notorious Soviet-era Gulag labor camps used to “politically reeducate” prisoners.

“I assure you, despite the label of 'forced labor' this punishment has a more social character,” he said, adding that authorities had studied “the best aspects of the Soviet experience.”

Maximenko also explained that the centers will not be subject to the same security measures as existing correctional facilities. Inmates will be allowed to leave the facility with the administration’s permission, but they will not have the right to choose, switch or refuse jobs assigned to them, he said.

Inmates will be able to use the Internet and mobile phones, unlike prison inmates.

He also said that they will receive a salary, taxed at between 5 and 10 percent, and would even be entitled to 18 days annual paid leave after the first six months in the facility.

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