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In First, Russia Sides With 'Gulag Children' in Legal Fight for Housing – Lawyer

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Sergei Kiselev / Moskva News Agency **The Garden of Memory near the Gulag History Museum in the center of Moscow.**

A Russian court has for the first time sided with the descendant of a Stalin-era Gulag prisoner in his long-running battle for housing, a human rights lawyer said Monday.

"It's a small but important victory," Grigory Vaypan, a lawyer with the Memorial rights group, said in a Facebook post.

Lifelong Perm region resident Nikolai Mitkin was refused housing in southern Russia's Stavropol region, where his parents had lived before being exiled in 1941.

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Local authorities argued Mitkin, 71, was ineligible as a non-Stavropol resident despite the Supreme Court's 2019 ruling granting the children of Soviet political repressions the right to receive state housing in their parents' original places of residence.

A Stavropol court overturned the local authorities' refusal and ordered to place Mitkin on a waiting list for housing, according to Vaypan.

"This is the first court ruling known to me where stubborn local authorities are required to recognize the 'Gulag children's' rights," he said.

Soviet authorities passed a law in 1991 acknowledging for the first time all victims of Stalin-era repressions and allowing them to claim compensation for their confiscated homes.

After decades of shifting responsibility and the authorities' non-committal attitude to compensation, Russia's Constitutional Court issued a surprise ruling in 2019 upholding the right to prioritized housing applications for three "Gulag Children."

That ruling sparked a rare legislative battle in the State Duma, Russia's lower house of parliament, with a group of cross-party lawmakers sponsoring a set of amendments to the government's cosmetic bill that would uphold the Constitutional Court ruling by fast-tracking housing claims for the victims' descendants.

Mitkin was among those who filed a class-action lawsuit against the Duma last fall, Vaypan said.

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