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Russia's Justice Ministry Seeks Dissolution of Moscow Helsinki Group

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Russian President Vladimir Putin presents an award to Lyudmila Alexeeva, the head of the Moscow Helsinki Group, in 2017. **kremlin.ru**

Russia's Justice Ministry has filed for a court order to shut down one of the country's most prominent and respected human rights organizations, the state-run RIA Novosti news agency reported on Tuesday.

In its legal filing, the Justice Ministry claimed that the Moscow Helsinki Group had violated unspecified "legal requirements" while carrying out its activities, a statement on the group's website said.

Founded in 1976 by a group of Russian dissidents led by Soviet physicist Yuri Orlov, the group was named for the landmark 1975 Helsinki Accords on human rights and grew to become one of the principal civil society mechanisms for exposing human rights abuses in both the Soviet Union and Russia.

In addition to working to protect human rights, the Moscow Helsinki Group has for years also

been sending proposed legislative initiatives to the State Duma, requesting the transfer of those held in pre-trial detention to house arrest, calling for an amnesty of prisoners and urging the state to protect journalists.

In order to avoid being labeled a foreign agent in 2012 in the wake of new legislation, the group announced that it would no longer accept any foreign funding to finance its work.

Even if the legal move to "liquidate" the organization is successful, it won't be the group's first experience falling foul of the law. In 1982, following the arrest or forced emigration of many of its members, the group's activities ceased, only for them to start up again just seven years later when Mikhail Gorbachev's policy of perestroika took hold.

In March, a Russian court confirmed the dissolution of another prominent rights group, Memorial, which was subsequently awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

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