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Court Orders Closure of Russia's Oldest Human Rights Group

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Members of the Moscow Helsinki Group and their lawyers. **Alexander Zemlianichenko / AP / TASS**

A court in the Russian capital ordered the closure of the Moscow Helsinki Group, one of Russia's most prominent and respected human rights organizations, on Wednesday.

Last month, Russia's Justice Ministry filed a court order to shut the group down, claiming that it had violated unspecified "legal requirements" while carrying out its activities, according to a statement on the group's website.

The lawsuit was based on the results of an unscheduled inspection by the Moscow Prosecutor's Office, which took place in November, the RBC business daily reported.

According to the court, the group's main violation was that it carried out its activities across Russia despite having the status of a regional organization, according to the RBC business daily.

Related article: On This Day in 1976 the Moscow Helsinki Group Was Founded

The Moscow Helsinki Group was founded in 1976 by a group of Russian dissidents led by Soviet physicist Yuri Orlov and was named for the landmark 1975 Helsinki Accords on human rights.

The organization became one of the principal civil society mechanisms for exposing human rights abuses in the Soviet Union as well as, later on, in Russia.

The Moscow Helsinki Group's activities included 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.

Last year, a Russian court also upheld an order dissolving another prominent rights group, Memorial, which was subsequently awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

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