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Moscow Court Orders Sakharov Center's Dissolution

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An employee stands by a portrait of Andrei Sakharov's late widow and rights activist Yelena Bonner in the Andrei Sakharov Museum and Public Centre in Moscow. **Kirill Kudryavtsev / AFP**

A Russian court has ordered the closure of the Sakharov Center, one of the country's oldest human rights groups, Interfax reported Friday.

The center, which was founded to honor the memory of Soviet dissident and Nobel Peace Prize winner Andrei Sakharov, had been an iconic place for exhibitions and discussions about human rights since its opening in 1996.

According to Interfax, the Justice Ministry filed a court order to shutter the group for alleged "systematic gross and irremediable violations of the law" in connection with its staging of an exhibition dedicated to Sakharov in regions of the country where it did not have a branch.

The organization was also accused of publishing videos without a "foreign agent" stamp, as is required under its status as a "foreign agent" organization.

The Moscow City Court on Friday approved the Justice Ministry's request, Interfax reported.

The Sakharov Center said it did not acknowledge the violations.

"It's disheartening, yet it mirrors reality. The public commission on Sakharov's legacy and the contemporary Russian Federation cannot coexist...And everything that is happening today is exactly the opposite of what Sakharov fought for," Sergei Lukashevsky, the director of the Sakharov Center, said in a Facebook post Friday.

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"We will continue our work. The legacy does not belong to the regime, but to the people. It belongs to all of us," he added.

This spring, the center announced that it was closing its premises in central Moscow following an eviction order from the city authorities.

Formally, the authorities' decision to deprive the Sakharov Center of its Moscow office was a result of the organization's designation as a "foreign agent," as Russian law forbids "foreign agent" organizations from receiving any state support.

The Sakharov Center said it believed the order was motivated by the Kremlin's desire to destroy "independent organizations that defend the public interest."

The closure of the Sakharov Center comes amid a broader crackdown on dissent in Russia that has intensified since the invasion of Ukraine and seen unprecedented pressure on independent journalists and human rights activists.

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