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Russia Officially Withdraws From Europe's Anti-Torture Convention

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The Matrosskaya Tishina detention center in Moscow. **Kirill Zykov / Moskva News Agency**

Independent international monitoring of detention facilities in Russia has come to an end with the country's formal withdrawal from the European Convention for the Prevention of Torture, the Council of Europe said on Sunday.

In a statement, the Council of Europe said inspectors from the convention had carried out 30 visits to more than 450 detention facilities in Russia during the 23 years it was a member. Russia, however, permitted the publication of only four visit reports over that period.

"Russia may authorize the publication of [the remaining] reports at any time," the statement read, noting that the unpublished reports relate to 10 visits to the republic of Chechnya and the remaining North Caucasus regions between 2000 and 2017.

Per convention rules, Russia's withdrawal took effect on Nov. 1, one year after Moscow formally notified the Council of Europe of its decision.

Russia ratified the anti-torture treaty in 1998, two years after joining the Council of Europe. It was expelled from the Council of Europe in March 2022 following the full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

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The Council of Europe said the convention received "numerous accounts of alleged acts of torture and ill-treatment" across detention centers and penal colonies in Russian-occupied Ukraine and within Russia itself.

"However, due to the non-cooperation of the Russian authorities, the CPT has been unable to conduct a visit to the Russian Federation to examine the situation for itself," it said.

Russia also withdrew from the European Convention on Human Rights in 2022, ending its jurisdiction under the European Court of Human Rights.

Rights groups have warned that exiting the treaty removes the last remaining international safeguard for inmates in Russia's penal system. They have credited the convention for helping to ease overcrowding, improving conditions in penal colonies and securing better protection for some inmates.

Russia remains a party to the UN Convention Against Torture, which it ratified in 1985.

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