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## **Russia: NGO court defeat is another 'dangerous' sign for human rights**

Russian authorities' attempts to stifle human rights work in the country are increasing, Amnesty International warned today after an NGO in the city of Ryazan lost a lawsuit triggered by a repressive new law.

Memorial Ryazan unsuccessfully challenged a prosecutor's warning that it had failed to register as a "foreign agent" under the law, which deems its human rights work "political".

"Memorial Ryazan's defeat in court is yet another dangerous development for Russian NGOs and highlights the chilling implications the 'foreign agents law' has on the future of human rights reporting in the country," said Sergei Nikitin, director of Amnesty International's Moscow office.

"If other Russian courts take a similar line, it will escalate a process that essentially paralyses the country's human rights movement - a prospect the Kremlin would appear to relish."

Last July, President Vladimir Putin approved the so-called "foreign agents law" which came into effect in November 2012.

It requires any NGO receiving foreign funding to register as an "organization performing the functions of a foreign agent" if it engages in what it defines very loosely as "political activity".

The Russian government said the law is meant to increase transparency and accountability of civil society organizations in the country, even though strong regulations in that area already existed.

"The restrictive NGO law is the Russian authorities' thinly disguised attempt to continue to stifle and discredit the work of those that dare to report on human rights issues," said Sergei Nikitin.

Content on the Memorial Ryazan website, which included several Amnesty International documents, was used as evidence that the organization's work was "political" in today's civil court hearing.

Since the law was enacted, independent civil society organizations across Russia have been subjected to pressure, intimidation, harassment and smear campaigns by the authorities.

Offices of hundreds of NGOs – including Amnesty International's Moscow office – have been "inspected" by representatives of the prosecution, tax authorities and other government agencies.

The law contravenes the Russian Federation's obligations under international human rights law, including the right to freedom of association