

Medvedev Skips 4th Rights Panel Meeting

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Citing a busy schedule, President Dmitry Medvedev has postponed a meeting with his human rights council for the fourth time, prompting outcry from members of the body.

The meeting was pushed back from this Thursday until an unspecified date in February, and may even be moved into March, council head Mikhail Fedotov told Interfax on Monday.

"The president has more important things to do than to protect the rights of his citizens," veteran human rights defender Lyudmila Alexeyeva, who heads the Moscow Helsinki Group, told The Moscow Times.

The presidential vote is set for March 4. Medvedev is not seeking re-election and Prime Minister Vladimir Putin is widely expected to win.

The council's last meeting with the president took place on July 5 with a follow-up scheduled

for November. It was first delayed to December and then to January, council member Svetlana Gannushkina told The Moscow Times.

"We take it as a sign that the president is no longer an acting one," said Gannushkina, who heads Civic Assistance, a charity for migrants.

"Medvedev and Putin have agreed upon everything and care about nothing else," she said in a reference to Putin's public announcement on Sept. 24 that he and Medvedev had agreed Putin would return as president in 2012.

Medvedev had promised to meet the council three- to four-times a year, but only two meetings took place last year — in February and in July, Gannushkina said.

Both Alexeyeva and Gannushkina said the council was told the president was "very busy."

Alexeyeva also complained that Medvedev had failed to reply to at least two documents sent to him by the council last year — one, a report arguing that oil tycoon Mikhail Khodorkovsky's jail sentence was illegal, and the second, recommendations for amendments to the criminal code, toughening penalties for rogue police officers.

The 400-page report about Khodorkovsky was compiled by nine Russian and foreign experts and sent to Medvedev on Dec. 23, while the amendments were sent to the president more than a year ago, Alexeyeva said.

"Many of the [council's] recommendations have been officially fulfilled, but we are not satisfied with the way it was done," Fedotov said, according to Interfax.

The next meeting of the council with the president will be dedicated, among other things, to ecological rights of the citizens, protection of children's rights, migration policy and the search for servicemen who disappeared in the North Caucasus, Fedotov told Interfax.

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