

Human Rights Group Given 3 Days to Clear Office

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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The group For Human Rights, which was kicked out of its city-owned office in the middle of the night over the weekend, has been given three days to move its belongings out of the space, a City Hall official said.

Yekaterina Solovyova, deputy head of City Hall's property department, went to the building on Maly Kislovsky Pereulok on Monday with For Human Rights head Lev Ponomaryov to discuss the terms of vacating the office, Interfax reported. The two agreed that all the group's belongings would be taken out within three days, and Solovyova promised to assist the group in arranging for transportation of equipment and furniture.

The agreement comes after a violent nighttime raid over the weekend that saw Ponomaryov and Moscow mayoral hopeful Sergei Mitrokhin forcibly thrown out of the office by police. Amid what critics have called a major crackdown on nongovernmental groups, dozens of which have been searched in recent months, the police action triggered fears of an

escalation in authorities' tactics against civil society.

Moscow police are conducting an internal inquiry into the incident, first deputy police chief Alexander Gorovoi said Monday at a meeting of Russian human rights ombudsmen, Interfax reported. Gorovoi also apologized for the officers' actions.

Moscow rights ombudsman Alexander Muzykantsky questioned the legality of the raid, noting that the police acted on instructions from City Hall, not on a court order.

"After these events, the question arises: Are the police acting lawfully?" Muzykantsky said, Interfax reported.

The feud between For Human Rights and the city stems from a dispute over the group's lease on the office space. The city says it told the group in February that the rental agreement was coming to an end, while the group says it believed a new agreement could be negotiated since it had occupied the office since 1997. City authorities have said they want to give the space to an unnamed social welfare group.

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