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# Russia extends dead lawyer inquiry

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Russia's Interior Ministry has been accused of "spitting on the grave of a dead man" as it pressed on with the investigation into Sergei Magnitsky, the lawyer who died in custody.

Mr Magnitsky was working for Hermitage Capital, an investment fund, when he claimed to have uncovered a \$230m (£150m) tax fraud, allegedly perpetrated by Interior Ministry officials. The same officials arrested him over tax evasion in late 2008, and he spent nearly a year without trial in Moscow's notorious Butyrka prison, where he died of untreated pancreatitis in November 2009.

His death caused an international outcry, but Russian officials seem keener on investigating the allegations against Mr Magnitsky than uncovering the circumstances of his death. The Interior Ministry said yesterday that the posthumous inquiry had been extended for another two months, because of a "need to identify the position of the relatives".

According to Russian law, after a suspect has died, the inquiry can be closed with the consent of close relatives. Nikolai Gorokhov, the family's lawyer, who made the "spitting" comment, said yesterday that the ministry's position was disingenuous in the extreme. "Magnitsky's family has repeatedly stated their position about the illegality of the posthumous prosecution by filing formal written complaints to all Russian state bodies," he said.

"I say, 'I want to end this case' and they say, 'No, we won't accept it, you forgot a comma or you used the wrong ink'," Mr Magnitsky's mother, Natalya Magnitskaya, said in an interview with Reuters last week.

Rights activists say broken bones and bruises on the body of Mr Magnitsky, 37, show he was beaten in custody. A special rights group reported to President Dmitry Medvedev on the case over the summer, and found that police investigators and prison officials were at least partially to blame for the death. The only people to have been charged are two prison medics.