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Khodorkovsky's Mother Says Putin Blocking Son's Release

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Marina Khodorkovskaya speaking before a concert dedicated to her son at the Royal Albert Hall in London. **Luke MacGregor**

LONDON — Former Yukos CEO Mikhail Khodorkovsky believes that he will remain in jail as long as Vladimir Putin is holding Russia's reins, his mother said in an interview.

In London to attend the British premiere of a symphony dedicated Khodorkovsky, she accused Putin, the prime minister, of trying to block her son's release.

"Mr. Putin, I think, the idea of his life is to keep him in jail forever," said Marina Khodorkovskaya, 75. "As long as Putin is in power, [the release] will not happen — unless the West — its leading nations — finds ways of influencing Putin."

She was speaking outside London's Royal Albert Hall where a symphony by Estonian composer Arvo Part, who was persecuted in Soviet times for his avant-garde style, was performed Friday.

Already serving an eight-year sentence, Khodorkovsky now faces an additional 22 years in prison in a trial that began last year. He was jailed in 2003 and convicted in 2005 of fraud and tax evasion when Putin was still president.

Putin's critics say the new charges were trumped up to keep Khodorkovsky in prison beyond the 2012 presidential election, in which Putin has not ruled out a return to the Kremlin.

Russian authorities say the trial is in line with the law and part of a campaign to root out corruption in the economy.

Khodorkovsky once controlled an empire producing more oil than OPEC member Qatar.

Khodorkovskaya, gray-haired and wearing a white jacket, said she doubted that President Dmitry Medvedev would follow through on his promises to liberalize Russia and its judiciary.

"I have no hope there will be any loosening-up under the current government of our country," she said.

At the concert, part of this year's BBC "Proms" season, an atmosphere of pessimism appeared to be the main theme of the symphony, its haunting lyricism punctuated by what sounded like the deep bell toll of Russian Orthodox churches.

Part, a minimalist composer, said he dedicated the piece to Khodorkovsky because he was disturbed by the trial. Part left the Soviet Union in 1980 but later returned to Estonia, now part of the European Union.

"It pains me to realize that the price being paid by Khodorkovsky could turn out to be too high: It may end up costing him his life," he said in a statement after the concert.

Khodorkovsky has not explicitly voiced any political ambitions, but his mother said the Kremlin feared that once free, Khodorkovsky would rally supporters behind him to challenge the Kremlin's increasingly tight grip on the country.

"People are beginning to ... see him as a leader," she said, adding, however, that her son did not have such wishes. "There are fears that people will start to unite around him."

She said she was allowed to see him twice a month for an hour, when they would talk by telephone through a glass wall.

"He is holding up well, with a lot of energy. He never complains about anything," she said. "I don't think he has changed. He still believes in what he always believed in."

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