

Trial Over Rights Lawyer's Murder Starts

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An open jury trial over the 2009 twin killing of lawyer and rights activist Stanislav Markelov and liberal Novaya Gazeta reporter Anastasia Baburova started in the Moscow City Court on Monday, Interfax reported.

Alleged ultranationalists Nikita Tikhonov, 30, and Yevgenia Khasis, 25, are charged over the attack, but plead not guilty to murder charges.

The 34-year-old Markelov, who often represented victims of ultranationalists' attacks in court, was gunned down in broad daylight in downtown Moscow. Baburova was shot dead when she tried to stop the attacker.

Markelov represented the mother of Alexander Ryukhin, an activist fighting hate crime in Moscow, who was shot dead in 2006, anti-xenophobia watchdog Sova reported. Tikhonov was one of the people charged in the case.

Several neo-Nazi attackers were convicted over Ryukhin's death in a 2007 trial, but Tikhonov escaped arrest and went into hiding. He was detained along with his girlfriend, Khasis, in 2009, months after Markelov's shooting.

The two requested sanction to marry while in pretrial detention, but the investigators denied the request, allegedly believing it an attempt by suspects to gain good publicity ahead of the trial.

Tikhonov, who was on the run from the law over Ryukhin's murder, admitted Monday to charges of use of forged documents and illegal firearms possession, but denied killing the lawyer and the reporter.

Tikhonov also admitted that he had no alibi for the day of the 2009 shooting, but said killing Markelov was pointless, because charges in Ryukhin's murder were levied by police, not the lawyer.

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