

2 Dozen Khimki Defenders Detained

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Environmental activist Yevgenia Chirikova and Left Front Leader Sergei Udaltsov at an earlier protest against the planned Khimki highway. The two were detained by police at Sunday's protest. **Igor Tabakov**

Riot police roughly broke up a protest over the destruction of the Khimki forest, briefly detaining two dozen activists and beating one so badly that he required hospitalization, environmentalists said.

About 200 people gathered in the town of Khimki on Sunday for an unsanctioned rally over the centuries-old Moscow region forest, part of which is slated for destruction to make way for an \$8 billion highway, Interfax reported.

Among those detained were Left Front leader Sergei Udaltsov, Yabloko party leader Sergei Mitrokhin and environmental champion Yevgenia Chirikova, all of whom reported physical and verbal abuse by police officers.

Left Front activist Oleg Prudnikov was hospitalized after detention, Udaltsov said, without elaborating, Interfax [reported](#). Udaltsov said he himself was struck several times on his arms

and ribs.

Mitrokhin said officers twisted his arms and insulted him.

Another environmentalist, Yaroslav Nikitenko, said the detainees were dealt blows to their heads and abdomens if they refused to enter police vans.

Chirikova said a police officer roughly grabbed her by the neck, possibly inflicting an injury, Rusnovosti.ru reported. "My head is swelling," she said.

Police sought to have several detainees jailed for 15 days for resisting arrest, but in an unexpected move, a local court threw out all cases, citing multiple paperwork violations.

No law enforcement official has commented on the detentions.

But a representative of the Federal Road Agency lashed out at the environmentalists Friday, calling them "aggressive militants" and implying that they were to blame for any clashes. "Members of various extremist movements, including monarchists and nationalists, go to the Khimki forest and shout threats at workers and private security guards. Chirikova's supporters have urged [them] to bring air guns and smoke grenades," Yekaterina Varyonova told Gazeta.ru.

No environmentalists have been detained for using weapons in the forest, although the company subcontracted to clear the forest, Teplotekhnika, said last week that unidentified attackers torched its deforestation equipment.

Construction of the Moscow–St. Petersburg highway through the Khimki forest was halted last year by President Dmitry Medvedev, who ordered a review of alternative routes following a wave of public protests. But the government later authorized its resumption.

The developer, the North–West Concession Company, has demanded 4 billion rubles (\$143 million) from the state as compensation for the president–ordered delay, Vedomosti [reported](#) Friday, citing a [letter](#) from the company to state-owned Avtodor, which is in charge of the highway project.

The government has not indicated whether it will pay.

North–West Concession Company's shareholders include Arkady Rotenberg, a former judo trainer of Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, Vedomosti reported earlier.

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