

Orlov Acquitted of Slandering Kadyrov

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Oleg Orlov, head of the Memorial human rights group, gesturing as he arrives at a Moscow court on Tuesday. **Denis Sinyakov**

A Moscow court on Tuesday unexpectedly acquitted Oleg Orlov, head of the Memorial human rights group, of charges he slandered Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov.

The court ruled that Orlov's allegations that Kadyrov was responsible for the killing of Memorial activist Natalya Estemirova were "hypothetical" and did not constitute slander.

Orlov had maintained the charges were aimed at undermining Memorial, which has persistently accused Kadyrov of overseeing extrajudicial killings, kidnappings, torture and other violations in his province.

"It's a joyous occasion. I took this case as being political right from the start," Orlov said in a packed courtroom corridor. "I always said that in the eyes of the law we were right.

"I'm glad not that I've been vindicated, but that justice has been done," he said. "It's a very rare thing."

Kadyrov's representative in court, Andrei Krasnenkov, said they would appeal the "unjust" verdict.

"It doesn't matter if the court didn't find malice" in Orlov's words, Krasnenkov said. "It was slander. It's an unjust decision."

Orlov had said he held Kadyrov responsible for the July 2009 killing of Estemirova, who drew Kadyrov's ire by campaigning to help victims of torture and abductions and their relatives. She was kidnapped outside her house in Grozny and found shot along an Ingushetia roadside hours later.

The slander charges had called for a prison sentence of up to three years, but prosecutors said last week that they were asking only for a fine.

Orlov told the court last week that he felt it was his duty to the memory of Estemirova to tell the truth about Kadyrov's rule.

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