The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Pussy Riot Suspects to Remain in Jail

By Jonathan Earle

July 09, 2012



Jailed Pussy Riot member Nadezhda Tolokonnikova at a court hearing on June 20. **Vladimir Filonov**

Correction appended

A Moscow court has refused to free three women accused of performing an anti-Kremlin song in Christ the Savior Cathedral from pre-trial detention, dashing hopes of leniency and rebuking a growing public outcry for their release.

The court upheld the suspects' detention until July 24, denying their appeal to be set free. Prosecutors have argued that Maria Alyokhina, 24, Yekaterina Samutsevich, 29, and Nadezhda Tolokonnikova, 22, are flight risks and could commit fresh crimes if let go.

A lawyer for the women said they would continue a hunger strike they began last week after the court gave them until Monday to finish reviewing the 2,800-page court document detailing the hooliganism charges they face.

Hopes of clemency for the women had been high after another lawyer for the trio cited

a source in the presidential administration as saying that they would likely be released.

"I think this was a lousy joke. There was no call apparently," said billionaire Alexander Lebedev, who attended the hearing along with the head of his Novaya Gazeta newspaper, Dmitry Muratov.

The appearance Monday of Lebedev, Muratov and 51 others who have volunteered to guarantee that the women will appear in court if they are released appeared to lend a silver lining to an otherwise grim day for the suspects' backers, who see the case as politically motivated.

Lebedev told reporters that the only way to correct what he described as a miscarriage of justice was to increase the public outcry for the women's release.

"Don't be indifferent. We have no other options at the moment. Sign a petition. You don't have to take to the streets. ... Instead of exchanging meaningless information on VKontakte, take a stand," he said.

Over 35,000 people have signed an Internet petition calling for the women's release.

The women's other official guarantors include writer Lyudmila Ulitskaya and opposition leader Ilya Yashin, as well as actress Chulpan Khamatova and figure skater Yevgeny Plyushchenko, both of whom, unlike the others, supported Vladimir Putin for president.

Equally surprising was the appearance of a letter from actor and Orthodox priest Ivan Okhlobystin urging Patriarch Kirill to support the women's release.

Heat and humidity compounded signs of emotional exhaustion among the assembled supporters, some of whom welled up with tears as they waved to the suspects, their images beamed into the courtroom via video-link.

The trio offered scathing indictments of the court proceedings, accusing justices and prosecutors of carrying out political orders.

"I believe that my continued arrest is punishment for exercising my constitutional right not to testify. ... The Tagansky Court is carrying out a political order. It doesn't listen to us and always takes the prosecution's side," Alyokhina told the court from a cell in another room.

Yekaterina Samutsevich's lawyer, Violetta Volkova, said the women would not receive justice.

"I'm not at all optimistic that the court will eventually rule in the women's favor. They will be found guilty, even though there's no evidence of a crime," she said.

The trio was detained shortly after four Pussy Riot members wearing masks burst into the cathedral and performed a song called "Mother of God, Cast Putin Out!" No fourth suspect has been detained.

The performance was strongly condemned by state and church officials, who have called on the women to repent. The suspects have denied the charges.

It is now unlikely that the women will be released before July 24, when their detention — already extended twice — will again come up for review. They face up to seven years in prison if convicted.

Amnesty International declared the women prisoners of conscience in April, and last month over 100 prominent cultural figures, including Khamatova and rocker Boris Gribenshchikov, signed an open letter to the Supreme Court calling for the suspects' release.

The women have filed an appeal with the European Court of Human Rights.

Correction: An earlier version of this article incorrectly stated that Yekaterina Samutsevich is 19 years old. In fact, she is 29 years old.

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2012/07/09/pussy-riot-suspects-to-remain-in-jail-a16119