

Pussy Riot Counts on Madonna for Help

By [Natalya Krainova](#)

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The words "Free Pussy Riot" scrawled outside a Moscow district court where the punk band's case is being heard.

As a court ruled Monday that the Pussy Riot trial would start July 30, the three jailed punk rockers were pinning their hopes on Madonna's raising their plight at upcoming concerts in Moscow and St. Petersburg.

Moscow's Khamovnichesky District Court also said President Vladimir Putin and Patriarch Kirill would not be summoned to testify at the trial, which will be broadcast live on the court's website, and it ordered that new lawyers be appointed to the defendants.

The trio face up to seven years in prison on charges of hooliganism after being detained in connection with the impromptu performance of an anti-Putin song by four masked women in Christ the Savior Cathedral in February.

Amid a swelling chorus of support from the international music world, defense lawyers said they hoped Madonna would back the group at her concerts in Moscow on Aug. 7 and in St.

Petersburg on Aug. 9.

"She could attract the attention of very powerful people internationally who would raise the issue with Russian authorities," lawyer Mark Feigin said by phone.

A musician with the U.S. group Red Hot Chili Peppers, Anthony Kiedis, has already discussed Pussy Riot with Madonna, and he text-messaged Irish rock singer Bono about the case on Sunday, Feigin said.

Representatives for Madonna could not be immediately reached for comment. But the American singer has not shied away from criticizing the Russian authorities, promising earlier to denounce an anti-gay law at risk of arrest during her concert in St. Petersburg.

Red Hot Chili Peppers personally passed a letter of support to Pussy Riot lawyers after a concert Sunday, Feigin said.

"I applaud your courage, I pray for your freedom, and I will try to inform as many people as possible about what is happening to you," says the letter, [according](#) to Gazeta.ru, which cited the husband of defendant Nadezhda Tolokonnikova.

Red Hot Chili Peppers and British band Franz Ferdinand voiced support for Pussy Riot during Russian concerts on Friday and Saturday, and Faith No More invited members of Pussy Riot to perform at its Moscow concert on July 2.

Feigin credited the attention with keeping the case alive.

"The authorities hope that when they put Pussy Riot behind bars, everyone will forget them. Now they won't," he said.

The court on Monday rejected defense lawyers' requests to question 34 people on the witness stand, including Putin and Patriarch Kirill.

Police detained two people picketing in support of Pussy Riot outside the court, Interfax reported.

Human rights activists have also criticized the arrests, and Moscow Helsinki Group head Lyudmila Alexeyeva on Monday called on the authorities to free the rockers and pay them for the months spent in detention, Interfax reported.

She said the detention period did not match their alleged crime and noted that two of the defendants have small children, which, under the law, allows the court to show mercy.

The court on Friday extended their detention until 2013.

On Monday, the court ruled that new lawyers be appointed to them, even though each of them already has a lawyer.

The decision violates procedural norms and lawyers' ethics, Violetta Volkova, one of the band's current lawyers, told Interfax.

It was unclear whether the court wants to replace the current lawyers or force them to work

with new lawyers, but Volkova said the defendants would reject the court-appointed lawyers. No new lawyers have been appointed yet.

On Monday, the trial is expected to start with the judge reading the indictment, the defendants entering pleas of guilty or not guilty, and defense lawyers outlining their positions.

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