

'Karelia's Pussy Riot' Flees Abroad

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Yefimov has been charged with inciting hatred over an article he wrote criticizing the church and authorities.

A Karelian journalist and human rights advocate has fled abroad, fearing prosecution over his criticism of the Russian Orthodox Church.

Maxim Yefimov, head of the local Youth Human Rights Group of Karelia, has been charged with inciting hatred over his article "Russia Is Tired of Priests," which criticized the church and authorities.

"I had to leave abroad from mafia-run Karelia because of the lawlessness of the special services, which have opened an illegal criminal case against me and are willing at any cost to take revenge against me for my human rights activities," he said in a letter published online Thursday by the New Times magazine.

The report said he sent the letter from Poland.

He said is not planning to return to Russia, fearing further prosecution.

Russian bloggers have dubbed Yefimov "Karelia's Pussy Riot" in reference to the female punk band that performed in Christ the Savior Cathedral in February, leading three purported band members to be charged with hooliganism and jailed.

Church officials have made no public comment about the case.

In Yefimov's article, which he says angered local religious and law enforcement officials, he likened the Orthodox Church to United Russia, calling it a "ruling party" interested in money.

"Widespread corruption, oligarchy and the absolute power of intelligence services are directly linked to the revival of the Russian Orthodox Church," he wrote in the article, published Dec. 31 on the website of his human rights group.

The case against him was opened in April.

In May, a Petrozavodsk court ordered that Yefimov be placed in a mental institution to examine his "personality disorders." The decision was later canceled by a higher court.

He faces a sentence of up to two years if convicted.

In his letter, he said he escaped by going to Ukraine and then catching a bus to Poland.

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