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UN Agency Says Opposition Activist Disappeared While Seeking Asylum

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The UN High Commissioner for Refugees said Razvozzhayev disappeared after meeting with UN representatives in Kiev.

The United Nations refugee agency said Tuesday that detained opposition activist Leonid Razvozzhayev mysteriously disappeared after seeking assistance at its Kiev office last week, lending credibility to allegations that he was abducted.

Razvozzhayev, the Left Front activist and aide to State Duma Deputy Ilya Ponomaryov, was arrested Sunday by Russian investigators on suspicion of plotting to foment unrest in Moscow and was charged Tuesday. Also implicated in the case are fellow opposition members Sergei Udaltsov, the leader of Left Front, and Konstantin Lebedev, Udaltsov's aide.

On Sunday, as he was taken into a police vehicle in Moscow, Razvozzhayev said he was kidnapped in Kiev last week by police and "tortured" for two days.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees said Tuesday that Razvozzhayev had been receiving legal counseling at the Kiev office of one of its partner organizations on Friday when he vanished.

"During a break in the counseling session, the legal counselor contacted UNHCR in order to discuss the situation, and meanwhile Mr. Razvozzhayev said he would go to a nearby cafeteria for lunch and left his personal belongings in the office. When he did not return to the interview and the lawyer could not contact him on the phone, a missing person's report was immediately filed with the Solomiansky division of the police," the UNHCR statement said.

The statement also noted that sanctions could be applied to Ukraine if it is confirmed that the law was violated.

"Any removal to the country of origin not respecting existing procedures may lead to the [host] state being held responsible for a grave violation of national and international law," the statement said.

Ukrainian border agency official Sergei Astakhov told RIA-Novosti on Tuesday that Razvozzhayev entered Ukraine last Tuesday and legally returned to Russia on Friday, noting that he made no complaints to border guards upon exiting Ukraine. He also said Razvozzhayev did not leave by airplane.

Ponomaryov, citing a source in Ukraine, had alleged earlier that Razvozzhayev was brought to Moscow on a private aircraft.

Investigators said Razvozzhayev admitted his guilt on Monday by writing a confession in which he described how he, Udaltsov, Lebedev and others had planned riots and were sponsored by Georgian power broker Givi Targamadze. Other opposition activists and politicians have said he was tortured into confessing.

On Tuesday, the Investigative Committee said in a statement that it had officially charged Razvozzhayev with plotting riots and said it would bar Razvozzhayev's lawyer, Violetta Volkova, from working with him. If convicted, Razvozzhayev faces up to 10 years in prison.

The committee also said it has called on Udaltsov to appear Friday to be charged in the case.

Investigators justified dismissing Volkova from Razvozzhayev's defense by citing a law that says a lawyer cannot defend multiple suspects whose interests contradict each other.

"Lawyer Volkova is defending the interests of suspects S. Udaltsov and K. Lebedev in this criminal case. Considering the case materials, the interests of suspect Razvozzhayev contradict the interests of the named persons," the Investigative Committee statement said, apparently referring to Razvozzhayev's confession implicating Udaltsov and Lebedev.

Volkova said that she would not abide by the Investigative Committee's decision and that she would file a complaint arguing the ruling. But Parnas party leader Boris Nemtsov said Tuesday that opposition activists will try to find Razvozzhayev a new lawyer as soon as possible.

On Monday, Volkova visited the Lefortovo detention center, where Razvozzhayev is being held, but was not permitted to see her client.

According to activists, investigators have begun calling witnesses based on Razvozzhayev's confession.

"A person from the Investigative Committee who refused to give his name called me on Monday and said I had to appear on Tuesday to give evidence in the Razvozzhayev case," said Yury Suyetin, an opposition activist from Tver who participated in a seminar for election observers with Razvozzhayev.

"I refused to come without an official letter, whereupon I was told that if I didn't come, I would be delivered to Moscow the way Razvozzhayev was," Suyetin said.

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