

Pussy Riot Rocker 'Pleased' That Iranian Won Sakharov Prize

By [The Moscow Times](#)

October 28, 2012



From left, Alyokhina, Samutsevich and Tolokonnikova in court in August. **Vladimir Filonov**

Pussy Riot rocker Yekaterina Samutsevich, whose conviction was recently overturned, expressed approval that the 2012 Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought would go to two jailed Iranians: human rights lawyer Nasrin Sotoudeh and filmmaker Jafar Panahi.

Among the nominees for the award, named after Soviet dissident Andrei Sakharov, was punk band Pussy Riot and members Nadezhda Tolokonnikova, Maria Alyokhina and Samutsevich.

The trio was nominated for their unsanctioned protest in a Moscow cathedral in which they denounced President Vladimir Putin, a performance for which they were jailed and convicted of hooliganism inspired by religious hatred. In August, a Moscow court sentenced them to two years in prison, but Samutsevich was later released on appeal.

Samutsevich told The Associated Press that she was pleased that Panahi won the prize.

"It's very important for us that it went to someone who is in jail for their feminist views," she said. "That's essentially the same as what happened to us."

European Parliament members nominated the Pussy Riot women for drawing unprecedented attention to what they called the "absence of rule of law in Russia."

"The acts of protest and arrest of these three young women ... and their sentencing to two years in a labor camp, have done far more to focus the world's attention on the unscrupulous restriction of civil rights and the absence of the rule of law in Russia than did the earlier murders of journalists or the new repressive laws," their nomination said.

The prize winners, Sotoudeh and Panahi, have both been imprisoned by Iranian authorities in connection with their support of anti-government protests in Iran in 2009.

Other nominees for this year's award included jailed Belarussian civil activist Ales Belyatsky and three Rwandan activists.

The Sakharov prize was founded in 1988 and is given annually to one or more human rights campaigners around the world. It includes an award of 50,000 euros, according to its website.

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