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Blind Girl Criticizes Adoption Ban

By The Moscow Times

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A blind Russian high-schooler's impassioned criticism of the ban on American adoptions has added a new and compelling voice to the chorus of condemnation of the law.

Since her Jan. 6 blog entry complaining about the ban, written as an open letter to President Vladimir Putin, Natasha Pisarenko has attracted the wide attention of Russian media and, she fears, drawn the disapproving notice of authorities.

The adoption ban, which went into effect Jan. 1, is one of the most controversial moves of the first year of Putin's third term in the Kremlin. It was enacted as part of a bill retaliating for a new U.S. law that calls for sanctions against Russians deemed to be human rights violators.

But critics say it punishes innocent children by denying them a chance of escaping Russia's often-dismal orphanages. About 20,000 people marched in Moscow on Sunday to protest. The rally included banners likening Putin to King Herod, who the Bible says ordered the massacre of Jewish male infants.

Pisarenko wrote sarcastically that by signing the law, Putin was "saving children from American evil" and said that Russians rarely adopt disabled children because the country's medical system is backward and can't take care of them.

"They die because Russia doesn't have modern medicine," she wrote.

Pisarenko, blind from birth, wrote that she has painful personal experience with Russia's medical inadequacy. She said that although her father detected her blindness within days of her birth, Russian doctors were unable to diagnose it for months. But, she said, she received a precise diagnosis and the hope of treatment from German and American doctors.

"For Russian doctors, I am a child with an illness of unknown etiology, ... but in Germany and America I am a patient whose sight the doctors are trying to restore," she wrote.

Concluding her post, Pisarenko called on Putin to adopt five or 10 children with serious congenital disorders.

Putin's spokesman, Dmitry Peskov, was quoted by a local radio station as saying that "of course we will pay attention to such a statement. This girl is well-known to us. She's known by the regional authorities and by the Health Ministry," he said.

Pisarenko and her parents have challenged authorities before, according to Russian media, notably when her parents agitated to have her educated at a regular school in her native Rostov-on-Don rather than sending her away to a school for the blind. She is now in 10th grade, one year short of graduation under the Russian system.

In a later post, she expressed worry that her letter would cause her parents to be called in for questioning by regional authorities.

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