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Court Rejects Pussy Riot Member's Early Release

By The Moscow Times

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Nadezhda Tolokonnikova **Mikhail Voskresensky**

A Russian court on Friday rejected a plea for early release from prison by a member of the feminist punk band Pussy Riot, whose provocative songs and prosecution have made them a symbol of the country's opposition movement.

Nadezhda Tolokonnikova, who has been in custody since her arrest last March, is serving a two-year sentence handed down after the band staged an irreverent protest against President Vladimir Putin in Moscow's main cathedral.

Judge Lidia Yakovleva said evidence showed that Tolokonnikova did not deserve early release because she had "not always followed the rules of behavior" while in custody.

Tolokonnikova's attorney, Irina Khrunova, was quoted by Interfax as saying she would appeal on the grounds that the judge did not allow final statements by the defense team.

Tolokonnikova and two other band members were sentenced to prison terms on charges of hooliganism motivated by religious hatred. She sought early release after serving half her sentence, a provision allowed by law.

Another of the convicted band members, Yekaterina Samutsevich, had her sentence suspended on appeal last year.

Tolokonnikova, dressed in a Soviet-style dark prison uniform with a white scarf around her neck, told the court that the prison colony where she was serving her sentence did not support her plea of early release because she "didn't repent." Russian law does not make repentance a condition for an early release.

In its deposition, the prison colony described Tolokonnikova as "insensitive to ethics and conscience and thinking only about herself."

The prison colony also listed a penalty that Tolokonnikova received for failing to say hello to a prison official while she was in the hospital and noted that she was once reprimanded for her refusal to go out for a walk while she was held in a Moscow jail.

Defense lawyers urged the court to release Tolokonnikova so that she can take care of her 5-year-old daughter. Attorney Dmitry Dinze also complained that prison officials seem unable to provide proper conditions to treat her persistent headaches.

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