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Pussy Riot Member on Hunger Strike Hospitalized

By The Moscow Times

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A jailed member of punk group Pussy Riot was hospitalized Tuesday on the seventh day of a hunger strike to protest what she calls a persecution campaign against her.

Maria Alyokhina was transferred to a hospital in her prison colony in the Ural Mountains town of Berezniki, Pyotr Verzilov, who visited the colony Tuesday, said by telephone. He is the husband of one of her bandmates.

Alyokhina went on a hunger strike last Wednesday after she was barred from attending her own parole hearing. The court, which is across the street from the colony, denied her release.

Three members of the band — Alyokhina, Nadezhda Tolokonnikova and Yekaterina Samutsevich — were convicted last year of "hooliganism motivated by religious hatred" for an impromptu punk protest against Vladimir Putin in Moscow's main cathedral and given two-year sentences.

Samutsevich was later released on appeal. Last month, a court in the Mordovia republic denied parole to Tolokonnikova, who is married to Verzilov.

In a letter dated Monday and published by her lawyers, Alyokhina said prison officials were attempting to turn fellow inmates against her by holding a security crackdown in advance of the parole hearing.

Inmates could previously enter and leave their workplace freely, but now they have to wait for prison guards to escort them for up to an hour, Alyokhina's lawyer Irina Khrunova said. The wait denies them prompt medical care for injuries they sustain at work sewing uniforms, she added.

Alyokhina earlier spent five months in solitary confinement after claiming that officials deliberately lodged her with hardened criminals, including a convicted murderer, and encouraged them to intimidate her.

In a complaint filed in January, Khrunova wrote that officials did nothing after seeing criminals threaten Alyokhina with violence. The lawyer said officials also wrote false psychiatric reports and pushed Alyokhina into violating colony rules.

Judges have recently lifted several reprimands that officials filed against Alyokhina.

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