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8 Russian Sailors Acquitted in Nigeria Arms Smuggling Case

By The Moscow Times

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A court in Nigeria on Tuesday acquitted eight of 15 Russian sailors who had been arrested near the West African country's coast in October 2012 on arms smuggling charges.

The sailors were the crew of the MV Myre Seadiver vessel owned by Moscow-based security firm Moran Security Group.

Nigerian authorities detained the Myre Seadiver ship with the Russian crew in the port of Lagos on October 19 last year after finding weapons, including 14 Kalashnikov AK-47 assault rifles and some 8,000 rounds of ammunition, on board. Moran Security said the arsenal was designed to ensure protection against pirates who often attack ships along the Nigerian coast.

Alexei Petrov, an advisor to the ship owner, told RIA-Novosti that the eight acquitted sailors would leave Nigeria soon.

"All charges have been dropped against eight people, namely those who arrived in Nigeria by air and were later brought to the vessel via a sea agent," Petrov said.

"Charges have not been dropped against the remaining sailors, who arrived in Nigeria by sea after receiving authorization and visas via a local agent," he said.

Petrov said the court would continue the trial of the seven remaining Russians on Friday, June 21. He vowed to push for their acquittal, adding that the sailors are currently at the Russian embassy.

The crew members were released on bail in February on the surety of the Russian embassy.

The Foreign Ministry on Tuesday praised the acquittal and said it hoped the seven remaining suspects would be acquitted at Friday's court session.

The Myre Seadiver is an auxiliary vessel used to support maritime oil extraction and transport operations. The owner earlier said the vessel had been authorized to make a port call in Lagos three weeks before the arrival and had all necessary documents declaring the presence of weapons on board.

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