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Russia Seeks Answers In Diplomat 'Attack'

By Natalya Krainova

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Photographer Denis Sinyakov seen on a screen on Tuesday at a court hearing in Murmansk over his appeal to end pretrial detention.

President Vladimir Putin and the Foreign Ministry demanded explanations from Dutch authorities Tuesday after reports surfaced that a Russian diplomat was beaten and detained in the Netherlands over the weekend.

Putin demanded an apology, and the Foreign Ministry sent a note of protest to the Dutch authorities over the incident, calling for "those responsible for the attack to be held accountable."

The precise circumstances of the incident remained unclear Tuesday. According to Russian Foreign Ministry spokesman Alexander Lukashevich, Dutch police detained Dmitry Borodin, a minister-counselor of the Russian Embassy in The Hague, in his apartment Saturday night, saying they had received a report from his neighbors that children were being abused in the

residence.

Borodin said he was handcuffed, hit over the head with a baton and taken to a police station, Itar-Tass reported. After spending almost the whole night with police, Borodin was released without explanation, Lukashevich said.

Borodin, who has two children, said the child abuse report was a "false pretext." Local child protection services in The Hague said they were investigating the neighbors' complaint.

Dutch police spokeswoman Ellen van Zijl confirmed that there had been an incident involving a Russian diplomat, adding: "This man is fine. He is not in the hospital."

According to one analyst, the incident is tied to a growing spat over Russia's detention of a Dutch-registered ship used by Greenpeace activists to protest drilling in the Arctic last month.

Fyodor Lukyanov, chief editor of Russia in Global Affairs magazine, said Borodin's detention was retaliation by Dutch authorities for the seizure of the Arctic Sunrise ship and the arrest of 30 people who were on board, including some Dutch nationals.

"During the Cold War, these incidents with Soviet diplomats in the West happened all the time, naturally 'purely by accident.' But everybody understood that it was meant as a sort of signal" Lukyanov told RIA Novosti.

Both Lukashevich and Putin denounced the incident in The Hague as a breach of the 1961 Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, which forbids intrusion into diplomats' residences.

"This is a crude violation of the Vienna Convention. We are expecting clarifications, apologies and the punishment of those guilty," Putin said in Bali, where he was taking part in the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum.

The Dutch Foreign Ministry said the government would apologize if a police investigation found Borodin's right to diplomatic immunity under the Vienna Convention had been violated.

In Murmansk, a court rejected the appeals of three of those arrested on the Arctic Sunrise and scheduled hearings on the remaining appeals for later this week. All 30 of the detained crew members have appealed their pre-trial detention. They face up to 15 years in prison if convicted on piracy charges after protesting against oil drilling at the Gazprom-owned Prirazlomnaya rig in the Arctic last month.

Ship doctor Yekaterina Zaspa, Greenpeace spokesman Andrei Allakhverdov and freelance photographer Denis Sinyakov were denied release on bail or home arrest Tuesday.

The denials triggered further outrage from Greenpeace.

"There can be no justification for the continued detention of activists who did nothing more than express their beliefs through entirely peaceful means," Greenpeace International executive director Kumi Naidoo said in a statement.

“They have been charged with a crime that did not happen, they are being held for something nobody thinks they actually did. They are now prisoners of conscience, and as such they are the responsibility of the world,” Naidoo said.

The Dutch government has said it began legal proceedings against the Russian government over the incident. Russia, however, has said the arrests were fully warranted as the activists were in Russia's special economic zone, not international waters.

Material from Reuters is included in this report.

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