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Council Approves 'Broad Amnesty' That Could Free Pussy Riot

By Anna Dolgov

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The Kremlin human rights council has agreed on a proposal for a "broad amnesty" to mark the 20th anniversary of the Constitution, recommending that people convicted of nonviolent crimes, such as the two jailed members of punk band Pussy Riot, be freed by the measure.

Council head Mikhail Fedotov said the proposal, which is supposed to be sent to the Kremlin administration for review next week, was "truly rather broad" but did not specify a number of people to be let out of prison, Interfax reported Friday.

A member of the council, Kirill Kabanov, told the news agency that he thinks it should apply to at least 25 percent of all those incarcerated.

"Otherwise, the term ''broad amnesty'' loses its meaning," Kabanov said.

Last month, President Vladimir Putin told his human rights council to submit proposals

for the amnesty to mark the Constitution's anniversary in December. Among those expected to be freed are war veterans, pregnant women and people with disabilities, but it remains uncertain whether it will apply to those whom the opposition and human rights activists consider political prisoners.

Particular attention has been paid to whether it will extend to prominent convicts such as former oil tycoon Mikhail Khodorkovsky, the suspects in the so-called "Bolotnoye case," and Pussy Riot members Nadezhda Tolokonnikova and Maria Alyokhina.

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For Human Rights

Tolokonnikova and Alyokhina are each serving two-year prison sentences on hooliganism charges for their "punk prayer" in Moscow's Christ the Savior Cathedral in February 2012. Khodorkovsky is in prison on charges of money laundering and embezzlement, while the Bolotnoye case suspects face various charges, including "using force against a representative of the authorities," for participating in an opposition rally last year on Bolotnaya Ploshchad that ended in clashes with police.

One of the figures in the Bolotnoye case, Mikhail Kosenko, was sentenced Wednesday to indefinite mandatory psychiatric treatment. in a ruling decried by human rights activists.

The council agreed at their meeting Friday that specific cases would not be addressed.

"In accordance with the Criminal Code, an amnesty is never individualized," Fedotov said.

Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov told journalists Friday that after the proposal was received, it would be examined by the Kremlin's legal department. Fedotov said the date for when the amnesty would take effect could be determined by the end of October.

As the details of the measure begin to be formulated, the group For Human Rights has started collecting signatures for two petitions calling for the amnesty to be extended to the suspects in the Bolotnoye case and to Greenpeace activists charged over a protest in the Arctic.

"Such an amnesty would be a good and right act that would help make society more humane and correct the mistakes of justice," said the petition regarding the Bolotnoye suspects on the group's website.

The appeals have been signed by For Human Rights chief Lev Ponomaryov, novelist Lyudmila Ulitskaya, head of the Memorial human rights group Alexander Cherkasov and other prominent public figures, along with hundreds of ordinary Russians who completed an electronic form on the website.

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