

# Pussy Riot's Tolokonnikova Resumes Hunger Strike, Alyokhina Drops Appeal

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October 18, 2013



Maria Alyokhina (left) together with the other members of punk band Pussy Riot during a court hearing.  
**Vladimir Filonov**

Maria Alyokhina, a member of the punk rock group Pussy Riot, on Friday withdrew her appeal to have her sentence reduced in a show of support for fellow band member Nadezhda Tolokonnikova, who resumed her hunger strike on the same day.

Alyokhina told the judge at the Avtozavodsky District Court in Nizhny Novgorod that it would be "unethical" to seek release from prison while fellow Pussy Riot member Nadezhda Tolokonnikova was on hunger strike.

"If the Russian authorities are willing to grant me an early release, let them make it under a broad amnesty, along with other convicted women who have small children," Alyokhina said, Interfax reported.

President Vladimir Putin has sanctioned a "broad" amnesty for the 20th anniversary of the Constitution, marked on Dec. 12. Though lawmakers are still haggling over who the amnesty will apply to, it is expected that a large number of inmates will be freed, including the mothers of young children and other non-violent offenders.

Alyokhina's lawyer Irina Khrunova had been trying to get her client's prison sentence commuted to a fine or community service.

"I think it would be unethical to go to trial, when another Pussy Riot member is in a hospital," Alyokhina said. "I don't have the moral right to face trial when my friend Nadezhda Tolokonnikova doesn't have such an opportunity, because she is in a hospital or a prison about which one hears terrible things."

Tolokonnikova went on hunger strike last month to protest harsh conditions at her Mordovia prison, which she compared to a slave labor camp. She also accused a prison official of threatening to kill her.

Following her stay in a hospital, Tolokonnikova on Friday resumed her hunger strike after prison officials ordered her to be discharged and sent back to the prison in Mordovia, her husband, Pyotr Verzilov, said.

Tolokonnikova was "abruptly" plucked from the hospital in the middle of the night and transferred to the Mordovia prison's infirmary, which went against "earlier promises" made by prison officials to keep her hospitalized or have her transferred to another prison, Verzilov said.

Pussy Riot members were sentenced for performing a short anti-Putin song at Moscow's Christ the Savior Cathedral in 2012. Many human rights groups in Russia and abroad consider them to be political prisoners.

Alyokhina and Tolokonnikova's prison terms are set to expire in March 2014.

Original url:

<https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2013/10/18/pussy-riots-tolokonnikova-resumes-hunger-strike-alyokhina-drops-appeal-a28737>