

U.S. and Russian Envoys Trade Jibes Over Pussy Riot

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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From right, Tolokonnikova and Alyokhina standing with Madonna on stage at the Amnesty International concert. **Evan Agostini**

UNITED NATIONS — U.S. Ambassador Samantha Power traded jibes with Russia's UN Ambassador Vitaly Churkin on Wednesday over her meeting with two members of the Russian protest punk band Pussy Riot who were recently freed from prison.

Power tweeted that she met "some brave 'troublemakers'" who discussed their time in jail.

"I asked Pussy Riot if they were afraid of prison. Response: No. In prison we could see the terrible conditions. It is human rights fieldwork," Power added.

Maria Alyokhina and Nadezhda Tolokonnikova were released in December after nearly two years in prison following a conviction for hooliganism for staging a protest in a Russian church, wearing balaclavas and screaming lyrics.

They came to the U.S. to participate in Amnesty International's "Bringing Human Rights Home" concert on Wednesday in Brooklyn, where they were to be introduced by Madonna.

When Churkin was asked about Power's meeting with Pussy Riot at a news conference late Wednesday, he quipped: "She has not joined the band?"

As the journalists burst into laughter, he said: "I would expect her to invite them to perform in the National Cathedral in Washington. This is my expectation. Maybe they arrange a world tour for them — St. Peter's cathedral in Rome, then maybe in Mecca in Saudi Arabia and end up with a gala concert at the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem."

"If Ambassador Power fell short, I would be disappointed," Churkin added.

After hearing his comments, Power tweeted: "Ambassador Churkin. I'd be honored to go on tour with Pussy Riot — a group of girls who speak up and stand for human rights. Will you join us?"

"I can't sing, but if Pussy Riot will have me, Amb Churkin, I say our 1st concert is for Russia's political prisoners," she added.

At Wednesday's concert, the Pussy Riot pair sought to draw attention to the fate of eight Russian demonstrators who will be sentenced later this month after being charged with mass disorder at a 2012 protest against Putin.

While Pussy Riot did not perform, R&B singer Lauryn Hill, Blondie, and the alternative rock groups Imagine Dragons and Cake played at the all-star concert at a packed Barclays Center in Brooklyn.

"Pussy Riot in many ways symbolizes the spirit of what Amnesty stands for, which is that we take injustice personally and that we speak truth to power," said Salil Shetty, Amnesty's secretary general, at a press conference before the concert.

"We do not want anybody to be fooled by what is happening before the Sochi Olympics."

At the same news conference, Alyokhina said she absolutely did not regret the performance that landed her in prison and said there was no question but that she would continue to live in Russia.

"We want to say to him, 'Leave,'" she said of Putin.

While in the U.S., the women plan to visit prisons and meet with related non-governmental organizations to gain insight into how the Russian prison system might be improved.

Material from Reuters is included in this report.

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