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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Bear Freed After Being Forced to Live in Retired Circus Trainer's Van

By Allison Quinn

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Animal rights activists have managed to liberate the last of several bears they claim were forced to live in a van and perform at children's parties by a former circus trainer trying to make a quick buck.

The bear was released and sent to a rehabilitation facility by Moscow authorities and activists from the animal-rights charity BIM Fund on Wednesday, according to a statement released by the VITA Animal Rights Center.

"For seven years, we have been organizing a relentless stream of publicity for the walled-up captives. Thirty programs on television, dozens of newspaper articles and even a talk show on the problem were required before something was finally done," activists said in the statement.

The group had been campaigning for years against Yelena Savelyova-Volosyevich, a former animal trainer for the circus, who they claim had forced at least five different bears to live in a

van in the courtyard of a Moscow apartment building. Savelyova-Volosyevich had used the bears to earn money at children's events and corporate parties, they said.

The bears "constantly experience fear, stress and physical torment," animal rights' activists said in an earlier Change.org petition to pressure authorities to take measures against Savelyova-Volosyevich.

"The bear is constantly locked up in that car, whether it's 30 degrees Celsius or minus 40 degrees Celsius, from time to time it rocks the car and roars, then goes completely quiet ... The animal cannot see daylight, since both the tiny windows are covered, he can't move, he can't have contact with his own kind ..." the petition said.

Savelyova-Volosyevich had evaded numerous attempts by Moscow authorities to free her four-legged captives, according to VITA's statement.

"The bears changed — Grisha, Dasha, Misha; the vehicles changed ... but it was always the same circus trainer," the statement said.

The case highlights what many consider to be lax laws on the treatment of animals in Russia.

Under the Criminal Code, a person can only be charged with animal maltreatment if an animal in their care is killed or maimed.

It is not uncommon in Moscow to see street vendors in tourist hot spots and public parks peddling photo-ops with exotic animals, such as alligators and monkeys.

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