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Chairwoman of Soldiers' Mothers NGO Detained on Fraud Charges

By Allison Quinn

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In August, Bogatenkova accused the Russian government of secretly sending troops to Ukraine to take part in the civil conflict there.

Police in Russia's Stavropol region have charged with fraud a 73-year-old human rights activist who claimed that Russian soldiers were fighting in Ukraine in a move that the woman's colleagues say is a reprisal for her work.

Lyudmila Bogatenkova, chairwoman of the Budyonnovsk branch of the Soldiers' Mothers Committee — an NGO that fights for the rights of soldiers — was taken into police custody Friday, the St. Petersburg branch of the NGO said.

No further details on the charges against Bogatenkova have been released, though the Soldiers' Mothers of St. Petersburg said the organization's offices in the town of Budyonnovsk had been raided prior to its head's detention.

A statement on the group's website said Bogatenkova's colleagues "unambiguously regard her detention and holding in a pretrial detention facility as an act of intimidation in connection with her activities."

The head of the Kremlin's human rights council, Mikhail Fedotov, on Sunday wrote on Twitter that he would "take control" of the situation with Bogatenkova.

In August, Bogatenkova accused the Russian government of secretly sending troops to Ukraine to take part in the civil conflict there. The activist said that Russian troops stationed in Dagestan were being paid 250,000 rubles ($7,000) each to go fight Ukrainian troops.

Bogatenkova's allegation, made on Dozhd TV by her fellow Soldiers' Mothers council member Ella Polyakova, came amid widespread speculation about the deaths of several Russian paratroopers from Pskov who some suspect died in Ukraine.

"I don't have documentary evidence for now, just the witness Lyudmila Bogatenkova," Polyakova told Dozhd at that time.

Russia's Defense Ministry denied that the deceased paratroopers were killed fighting in Ukraine.

Together with Sergei Krivenko, who heads a commission on military affairs in Russia's presidential human rights council, Polyakova filed a petition in late August asking Russian investigators to look into the circumstances of the deaths of several Russian troops.

So far, investigators have not responded to that request, according to a statement on the Soldiers' Mothers website, which notes that the list of soldiers who died in mysterious circumstances has now been sent directly to President Vladimir Putin.

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