

Russian Activist From Soldiers' Mothers Committee Hit With New Charges

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Russian investigators have hit a 74-year-old human rights activist in the Soldiers' Mothers Committee with a second count of fraud on top of charges issued against her in October, her lawyer said Monday.

Lyudmila Bogatenkova, who chairs the rights group's branch in the North Caucasus town of Budyonnovsk, was first detained on suspicion of fraud in mid-October.

Her arrest at that time prompted an outcry from her colleagues, who warned that her detention could aggravate her diabetes and heart problems. She was soon released from custody on the condition that she not leave town.

On Monday, investigators announced a second count of fraud against her, RIA Novosti reported Monday, citing Bogatenkova's lawyer, Andrei Sabinin.

Investigators say Bogatenkova promised a man that she would have his son freed from police custody if he paid her 800,000 rubles (\$12,000), the news agency reported.

Bogatenkova has maintained that she is innocent and described the case against her as an attempt to smear her name, Sabinin was cited as saying.

Bogatenkova's colleagues have backed her claims, describing the charges as a reprisal for her earlier claims that Russian soldiers had been sent to fight in Ukraine.

In late August, Ella Polyakova, a member of the Kremlin's human rights council, cited Bogatenkova as the source of claims that Russian soldiers in Dagestan had been offered 250,000 rubles each to go to Ukraine.

"I don't have documentary evidence for now, just the witness Lyudmila Vasilyevna Bogatenkova," Polyakova said in an interview with Dozhd TV.

The comments fueled speculation over Russia's involvement in Ukraine, a topic of heated debate ever since Russia's annexation of Crimea in March. While the Defense Ministry has repeatedly denied sending troops to Ukraine, many activists and journalists have made claims to the contrary.

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