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Stateless Man Released After Judicial Error Left Him Jailed for a Year

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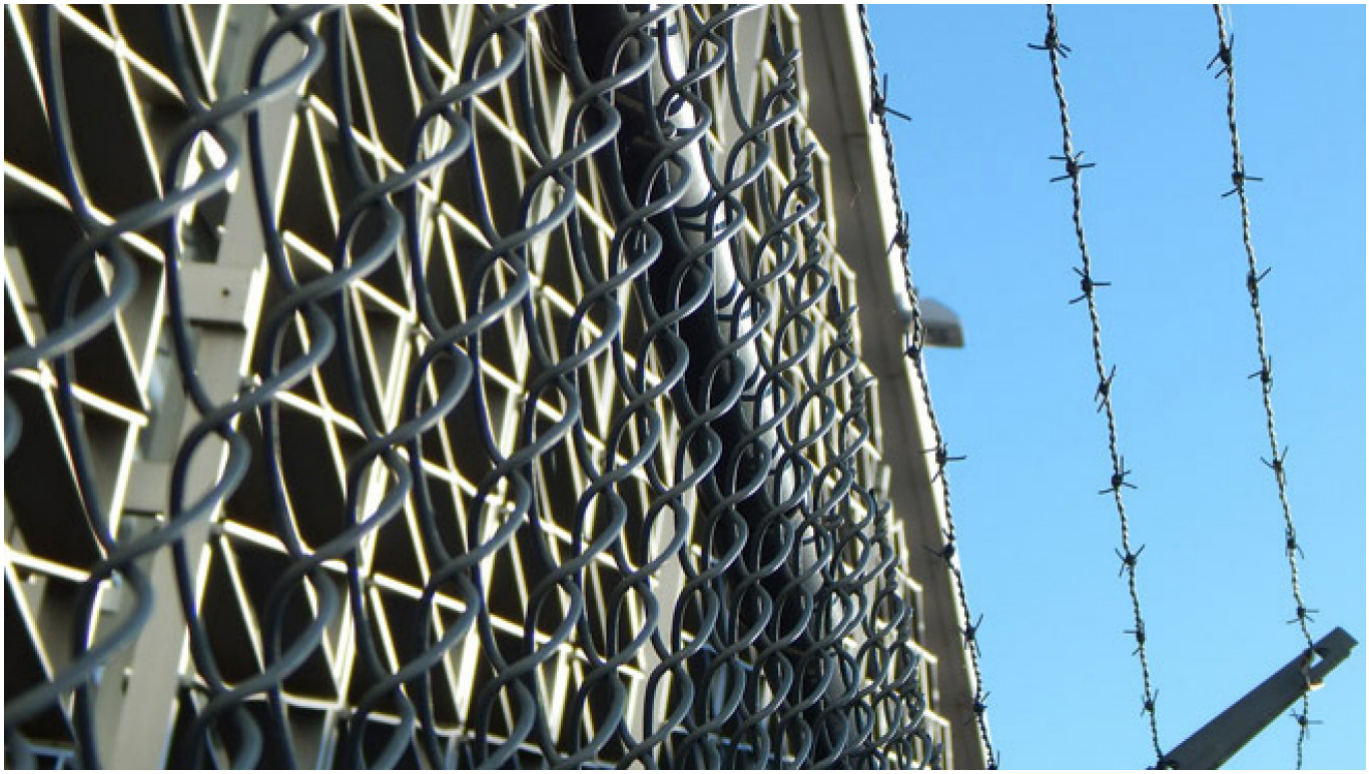

It remains unclear whether Puna Teza will receive compensation for his wrongful detention.

A stateless man originally from Nepal has been released after having been erroneously incarcerated for over a year, the Memorial human rights organization said in a statement Wednesday.

In June 2014, a St. Petersburg court ordered Puna Teza to pay 5,000 rubles ($93) based on its finding that he had been in Russia illegally. He was then placed in a detention center for foreign nationals awaiting deportation from Russia. However, the court failed to issue an expulsion order against the man, leaving him stuck in legal limbo, Memorial reported.

Nepal, which — having been Puna Teza's state of origin — Russian officials considered to be the country of his citizenship, did not recognize him as a national given that he was stateless, according to Memorial.

Memorial attorney Olga Tseytlina appealed to a St. Petersburg court to free Puna Teza, arguing that his detention had been arbitrary and illegitimate.

The court sided with Tseytlina and Puna Teza, as the statute of limitations had lapsed for the alleged migration offense.

"A judicial mistake cost Puna Teza one year of life in prison, spent in inhumane conditions. He did not understand the reason why he was being kept in custody if he had not received an expulsion order," Memorial's statement quoted Tseytlina as saying.

It remains unclear whether Puna Teza will receive compensation for his wrongful detention. Memorial did not elaborate on his current migration status in Russia.

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