Auction for Political Prisoners Goes on Despite Police Interference

By Anna Dolgov

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Russian opposition activists have held a benefit auction in Moscow for political prisoners, despite police interference that forced the gathering to change its location several times, activists said.

Maria Alyokhina, a member of the Pussy Riot punk rock band, said via Twitter that shortly after she arrived at the event Thursday, "we got kicked out and had OMON [riot police] called on us."

The benefit auction was initially scheduled to be held at Moscow nightclub Kitaisky Lyotchik Dzhao Da, or Chinese Pilot Dzhao Da, but police ordered the management to cancel the event, independent daily Novaya Gazeta reported.

The gathering then moved to another club, Mesto (Place), only to be evicted by police once again, until finally the auction ran its course in a courtyard, ending when OMON troops and two police vans arrived there, the report said.

Among the auction lots was an OMON uniform that Alyokhina wore in the video for Pussy Riot's first English–language song, "I Can't Breathe," which was released earlier this year. Portraits of former Russian President Boris Yeltsin and slain opposition politician Boris Nemtsov were also on offer, news portal Meduza reported.

"Political prisoners in the slammer are sewing uniforms, and I am selling a uniform to support political prisoners," Alyokhina said via Twitter.

Alyokhina and her fellow Pussy Riot member Nadezhda Tolokonnikova served time in prison for staging a performance against Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow's Christ the Savior Cathedral.

Human rights advocates in Russia and supporters overseas viewed them as political prisoners.

Memorial, a leading human rights group in Russia, maintains that the country currently has at least 50 political prisoners, according to the latest list, released by the group this summer.