

Savchenko's Sister, Sole Witness, Barred From Russia

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Ukrainian military pilot Nadezhda Savchenko sits inside a defendants' cage as she attends a court hearing in Moscow, March 4, 2015.

The younger sister of Ukrainian pilot Nadezhda Savchenko said Russia has banned her from entering the country, thus preventing her from testifying in court in her sister's defense.

Vera Savchenko said a Russian border guard denied her entry into Russia until 2020. According to the border guard, the order came from Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB), Vera Savchenko said on her Facebook page Tuesday.

The incident drew sharp criticism from Savchenko's defense team and Ukrainian authorities.

"So, for more than a year, Vera Savchenko presented no threat to Russia's national security, but before her testimony in court, it all started," defense lawyer Nikolai Polozov said via Twitter.

Another defense lawyer, Mark Feigin, said via Twitter that "Nadezhda Savchenko has been

denied her right to defense, because her sister Vera was declared as the only [defense] witness in the trial.”

The entry ban is a “crude and glaring violation of the legal rights of Vera Savchenko and her sister Nadya, aimed at increasing pressure on Nadya Savchenko,” the Ukrainian Foreign Ministry said in a statement Tuesday.

Moscow accuses Nadezhda Savchenko of abetting the killing of two Russian journalists in eastern Ukraine last year, before illegally crossing into Russia.

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