

Prominent Russian Figures Pen Open Letter in Support of Protest Rallies Detainees

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A group of Russian cultural figures have published an open letter calling for a fund-raising drive to pay for legal aid for jailed participants of political opposition rallies, the RBC news agency reported Monday.

Actor Oleg Basilashvili, novelist Vladimir Voinovich, poet and songwriter Yuly Kim, and physicist Alexander Gorodnitsky said in their letter they planned to raise money for “emergency legal aid” for those detained at protest rallies, the report said.

“Among the detainees [at protest rallies], there are political activists who know what they will be facing, but the majority are ordinary citizens who attend peaceful actions, envisaged by the Constitution, and who never expected to end up behind bars because of that,” the letter was quoted as saying.

The letter comes on the heels of a Moscow city court verdict, sentencing political activist Ildar Dadin to three years in prison for “repeatedly” breaking Russian protest laws, despite the

prosecution's calling for a two-year sentence.

“Neither you, nor we, can stop the shameful practice of the dispersal of peaceful demonstrations,” the open letter said, RBC reported. “But it is in our power to not leave our compatriots, who got into trouble, without help.”

“The system has a century-long experience of abusing people and of mass murders,” the letter said. “That's why it's necessary [to make sure] that by the time the detainees are escorted to a police station, there is already a lawyer ready to defend them.”

The fundraising drive was proposed by Russian politician and democratic activist Leonid Gozman, and an account for donations will be set up in his name on the Russian Yandex.Money online payment service, RBC reported.

Everyone who makes a donation will be able to monitor who the money is spent on, Gozman was quoted by RBC as saying.

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