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Miss Russia Contestant From Dagestan Slammed for Swimsuit Photos

By Anna Dolgov

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Albina Ildarova

The head of the State Duma's ethnic affairs committee has denounced a "Miss Russia" beauty pageant contestant from the predominantly Muslim region of Dagestan for posing for photographs in a bathing suit, and suggested she should stop disclosing her Dagestan origin, media reports said Wednesday.

But 21-year-old contestant Albina Ildarova, the daughter of two kickboxing athletes, came right back with a sharp retort.

"If they want to get to me, let them sort things out in their republic first," she said in a video interview with tabloid-style LifeNews television.

Dagestan has seen a surge in Islamic extremism over the past decade, and has been the sight of frequent deadly clashes between extremist insurgents and law enforcement forces. Amid

the rise of the ultraconservative Salafi Muslim militants, Dagestan also has its share of not-so-conservative nightclubs.

“I think people in Dagestan know what is going on there at night, at clubs, how girls dress,” Ildarova told LifeNews.

The young woman became the subject of criticism over her photo on the “Miss Russia” pageant website in a two-piece gray swimsuit — the same attire worn by other contenders in pageant photos.

Head of the State Duma committee for ethnic affairs Gadzhimet Safaraliyev — also a native of Dagestan — said the woman should renounce her ethnic and geographical identity, LifeNews reported.

“She should stop mentioning Dagestan, she should start saying that she is not a Dagestani at all,” Safaraliyev was quoted as saying. “She does nothing good by these [photos] to Dagestan or its women.”

“What she has posted [online] — she should not have done that, no matter what kind of 'miss' she wants to become,” he added. “Some kinds of norms should be observed.”

Ildarova and two other “Miss Russia” contenders from North Caucasus republics — Yekaterina Khachirova of North Ossetia, and Nazima Goova of Kabardino Balkaria — became targets of online bullying over their contest photos, according to media reports.

“What is the world coming to. Such daughters should be buried alive,” a commentator on social networks said, according to a screenshot posted by LifeNews. Yet another one chimed in: “Somebody shoot her.”

“It's not only my business, it's the business of every man from the Caucasus,” read another comment, according to screenshots posted by Russia's Komsomolskaya Pravda daily. “A normal man will never keep silent when he sees something like that. It casts shame on the whole nation. And Islam doesn't approve when a person walks past a sin and keeps silent.”

Ismail Berdiyev, who heads the North Caucasus' Muslim coordination center, said women from the region should not have their photographs taken in swimsuits, adding that “girls of all nationalities should be more modest,” Komsomolskaya Pravda reported.

But he also denounced online insults as “hooliganism” and said their authors should be “punished,” according to the report.

Women from Russia's Caucasus Mountains regions tended to stay away from beauty pageants in the past, “Miss Russia” director Larisa Tikhonova was quoted by the state-run TASS news agency as saying in March.

“Because of the mentality and the cautious attitude to beauty pageants, young women from the Caucasus practically did not participate in the past, but this year three very beautiful young women joined us,” she was quoted as saying.

Ildarova told LifeNews she had some initial reservations about having her photo taken in a

swimsuit, but decided no propriety standards would be violated.

“We all go to the beach, we show ourselves,” she told LifeNews. “It's not as if I appeared in some kind of erotic underwear.”

The pageant's final round is scheduled to be held in Moscow's posh Barvikha suburb on April 16.

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