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Russian Artist Pavlensky Stripped of Award Over Support for Police Killers

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The Human Rights Foundation (HRF) has stripped radical political performance artist Pyotr Pavlensky of the Vaslav Havel prize, awarded to him in May, the Dozhd news website reported Friday.

The decision was a result of Pavlensky's support for the Primorye Partisans, a group recognized as a criminal organization by the Russian government.

In 2010, a small group of locals started an insurgency in Russia's Far East region of Primorye, and were arrested in June 2010 following a siege. Two members of the band were found shot dead in an apartment when police raided — the cause of death was ruled to be suicide.

Members of the six-person group were found guilty of murder, robbery, the attempted murder of law enforcement officers, resisting arrest, assault on a female taxi driver, and a

number of related crimes. And in February 2014, group members were sentenced to various terms of detention, from eight years to life. In March 2016, a new trial began after the Supreme Court abolished the previous court ruling.

The HRF, at the time of awarding Pavlensky the prize, sought assurances that the prize money would not be given to a group "employing violence to achieve its aims." Pavlensky said that he would not give money directly to the group but would fund the group members' legal defense during the new trial, Dozhd reported.

Support for the Primorye Partisans group "contradicts Havel's nonviolent and creative legacy, " Dozhd reported, citing an HRF statement. The award was withdrawn following "comments made by Pavlensky on July 4, his dedication of the prize to the Primorye Partisans and his intention to donate prize money to said group," Dozhd reported.

The committee stripped Pavlensky of the award, bronze statue and the cash prize. The financial reward of $42,000 will be given to an additional laureate next year, Dozhd reported.

Pavlensky recently served a seven-month prison term for a political protest in November 2015 in which he set fire to the entrance of Russia's Security Service headquarters.

The Vaclav Havel Prize for Creative Dissent was founded in 2012 by the HRF and named in honor of the first president of the Czech Republic, a poet, playwright and human rights activist. It is awarded for civic bravery and achievements in the field of human rights. In 2014 the award was given to members of the punk protest group Pussy Riot.

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