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Pro-LGBT American Pastor Appeals Russian Deportation

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The lawyer of an American pastor has appealed the decision to fine and deport him from Russia for illegal missionary work, the Interfax news agency reported Tuesday.

The 72-year-old James Malecky — a vocal supporter of LGBT rights — was arrested on Saturday in the Russian city of Samara at a meeting of the city's LGBT network.

According to a police statement, he was arrested on suspicion of "engaging in religious activities," which violated the terms of his tourist visa, Interfax reported. Malecky was subsequently fined 2000 rubles ($30 dollars) by a Samara court and ordered to leave Russia within five days.

Malecky's lawyer Karina Artyunyan says there is no evidence suggesting any wrongdoing on his part. Reports had claimed that the pastor had come to Samara to perform a marriage ceremony for a same-sex couple, something strongly denied by his lawyer.

“There was no ceremony. The pastor was sitting at a table with friends when the police arrived. They were drinking tea,” she said.

Artyunyan expects the court to reach a decision in about two months and stated that her client would not remain in Russia for the hearing. She did not specify when he would leave the country for what she said were “safety reasons,” Interfax reported.

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