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Foreign Stars Call for Release of Russian Theater Director Serebrennikov

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Cate Blanchett **Stefan Wermuth / Reuters**

More than thirty prominent international cultural figures, including movie actress Cate Blanchett, have signed a petition in support of Russian director Kirill Serebrennikov who has been accused of embezzlement.

The petition published on the Change.org platform, calls on Germany's Chancellor Angela Merkel and Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel as well as Russia's President Vladimir Putin and the country's Prosecutor General's Office to push for the "flimsy" and "untenable" charges to be dropped.

The Gogol Center's artistic director Serebrennikov has been charged with defrauding the Russian government of 68 million rubles ($1.1 million) in arts subsidies. Serebrennikov, who was placed under house arrest last week, faces up to 10 years in prison. He denies any wrongdoing.

"The intention is to silence an internationally renowned director," the petition

reads. Blanchett's name is listed as a signatory alongside 35 fellow cultural figures, including Nobel Prize winning novelist Elfriede Jelinek, German film director Volker Schlöndorff and Russian conductor Vladimir Yurovski.

The petition, authored by German theater director Thomas Ostermeier and playwright Marius von Mayenburg had garnered over 3,000 signatures by mid-Monday.

Related article: Director Kirill Serebrennikov in Court

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