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Gulag Historian Yury Dmitriyev Hit With New Charges

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Yury Dmitriev (Igor Podgorny / TASS)

Investigators in northern Russia have launched a new case against a prominent historian and human rights activist famous for exposing mass killings from the Stalin era.

Yury Dmitriyev was arrested by traffic police late on Wednesday in Russia's northern republic of Karelia. State prosecutors have accused the head of the Memorial human rights group of child pornography charges in an ongoing case that human rights groups say is politically motivated.

Dmitriyev has now been charged with committing violent acts of a sexual nature, the state-run TASS news agency reported on Thursday, citing a senior Investigative Committee official in the republic of Karelia.

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If found guilty, he could face between 12 and 20 years in prison.

The state initially accused Dmitriyev of producing child pornography for taking naked pictures of his adopted daughter, which the historian maintained were made to monitor her health.

Experts during Dmitriyev's first trial found the pictures non-pornographic and he was acquitted in April 2018. But the ruling was overturned in June after prosecutors reportedly presented new evidence.

Dmitriyev's older daughter, Yekaterina Klodt, told the Novaya Gazeta newspaper late on Wednesday that she and her father had been stopped by traffic police "who said there was an alert on father... and that he had to be taken to a temporary detention facility."

TASS said Dmitriyev had violated the terms of his travel restrictions, citing an unnamed law enforcement source. A state-run television report alleged that Dmitriyev had been planning to flee to Poland.

But Klodt said her father had left Petrozavodsk, the capital of Karelia, to visit the graves of some friends and stop by a monastery.

The European Union has urged Russia to drop the "dubious" charges against Dmitriyev, who Memorial has recognized as a political prisoner.

"The situation is really difficult, but we aren't giving up and will keep fighting for him," Klodt told The Moscow Times.

"I hope that justice will win out in the end. And that dad will end up home forever without anything else like this happening again."

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