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6 Arrested in Wake of Leaked Russian Prison Torture Video

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The Yaroslavl penal colony No.1 (Sergei Metelitsa / TASS)

Six prison employees have been arrested and at least 17 fired following the release of a 2017 video showing a detainee being tortured at a prison outside Moscow.

Investigators opened a criminal probe into the alleged torture of prisoner Yevgeny Makarov in Yaroslavl last week after a Russian newspaper released video footage of the 2017 incident. Public officials in Yaroslavl have come under fire for not investigating the incident until the release of the video, despite repeated formal complaints from Makarov.

"The investigation has established the identity of all penal colony employees who participated in the beating of the prisoner. Today, six people have been detained," the Yaroslavl branch of the Investigative Committee wrote on Monday.

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Makarov's lawyer, Irina Biryukova, who shared the 10-minute body cam footage of the alleged torture with the Novaya Gazeta investigative newspaper, has reportedly fled Russia shortly after its publication.

"I learned from personal sources at the IK-1 [penal colony] that a number of employees who are featured in the recording have voiced threats of revenge against me," she wrote in a letter to Russia's chief investigator, asking for state protection for herself and her family.

Public Verdict, a human rights group that offers legal assistance to the victims of law enforcement abuse in Russia and employs Biryukova, asked federal authorities to take over the investigation of the alleged torture from local investigators. In a public statement on Facebook, Public Verdict said that at least one investigator had family ties to a guard in the prison, saying "that may explain why complaints of torture have not been investigated since 2017."

"Yaroslavl region's investigative bodies have discredited themselves with repeated refusals to launch criminal proceedings," the foundation wrote on Facebook, noting that an investigation was only launched after the publication of the leaked video.

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