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Russia Promises UN to End Prison Torture

By Reuters

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Yevgeny Leonov / TASS

Russia will prosecute perpetrators of torture in its prisons, including guards caught on video beating an inmate that has led to a public outcry, the deputy justice minister told the United Nations human rights watchdog this week.

Authorities detained six prison guards on Monday, days after a video circulated online showing at least 10 guards torturing and beating an inmate with truncheons.

The Novaya Gazeta newspaper published the 10-minute clip last week and said the incident took place in June 2017 in a prison in the city of Yaroslavl, northeast of Moscow.

UN experts on the Committee against Torture raised the case of the detainee identified as Yevgeny Makarov on Monday at the start of a two-day regular review of Russia's record.

Panel chairman Jens Modvig also called on authorities to provide a "clear signal" to law

enforcement personnel and the public that torture is prohibited.

"I would like to express my conviction that the investigation of this and other similar incidents, the consideration of these cases in our courts and the severe punishment of those responsible regardless of rank and position should become and I'm sure will become that very clear signal on the unacceptability of torture," Mikhail Galperin, who led Russia's delegation at the hearing, told the panel on Tuesday.

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Seventeen public officials have been removed from their jobs in connection with the case, including five who have been arrested, while a sixth arrest is under consideration, he said.

Regarding Makarov's lawyer — named by Novaya Gazeta as Irina Biryukova, who works for the Public Verdict rights group — Galperin said he did not know the circumstances that forced her to leave Russia.

"But I can assure you that if she feels threatened in connection with any communication that she may provide us with she will receive all guarantees according to federal laws on the state protection of victims, witnesses, and participants to criminal proceedings including lawyers," he said.

The lawyer could be assigned a personal security detail, moved to another place of residence or work, and have her documents or appearance changed, Galperin said.

A new commission was created this week at the federal and regional levels to inspect correctional facilities, he said.

They will be "equipped with video surveillance equipment that as in this particular incident have demonstrated their effectiveness in identifying serious incidents concerning inmates".

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