

Russia Admits Slave Labor Used at Pussy Riot Penal Colony

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Sergei Savostyanov / TASS

A senior prison official has been dismissed from a penal colony that Russia's penitentiary system admitted used slave labor, five years after the accusations were floated by a member of the anti-Kremlin punk band Pussy Riot.

Pussy Riot member Nadezhda Tolokonnikova was sent to a penal colony in the remote Siberian region of Mordovia for her participation in the band's anti-Putin "punk prayer" in February 2012. In 2013, Tolokonnikova [alleged](#) that she and her fellow inmates were treated as slaves and that its then-deputy warden, Yuri Kupriyanov, had [threatened](#) to kill her.

"It looks like Tolokonnikova was right," the deputy chief of the Federal Prison Service, Valery Maximenko, [told](#) the state-run TASS news agency Monday.

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In comments to TASS, Maximenko accused Penal Colony No. 14's chief warden Kupriyanov of "stuffing his pockets at the expense of the convicted women." A secret on-site inspection had uncovered that the women were "engaged in tailoring from 7 a.m. to 1 a.m., performing under-the-counter orders," Maximenko said.

He added that Kupriyanov has been dismissed alongside other officials suspected of using prisoners' labor.

"The issue of bringing a criminal case will be decided [later]," Maximenko was cited by TASS as saying, noting that all case materials have been forwarded to the Investigative Committee. "I hope this serves as a warning to everyone."

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Russia's prison system has been hit by a series of abuse scandals this year after bodycam footage leaked showing guards torturing a detainee north of Moscow. Following the first wave of investigations that uncovered [dozens](#) of cases of abuse in the summer, prosecutors launched a new round of inspections after the subject of prison abuse was [broached](#) at President Vladimir Putin's end-of-year press conference earlier this month.

Tolokonnikova said the prison service's admission of wrongdoing was "a shock" and "a burst of unearthly bliss."

"Turns out that resistance isn't futile and that it can bear fruit after years," she [wrote](#) on Facebook.

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