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Russia Sentences U.S.-Israeli Woman to 7.5 Years Over Airport Marijuana Possession

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Naama Issachar **Instagram**

A Russian court has sentenced a U.S.-Israeli woman to seven and a half years in prison on charges of drug possession and smuggling, her lawyer told Russian media Friday.

Police detained Naama Issachar, 25, in April while in transit in a Moscow airport and accused her of having 9 grams of cannabis in her bag, Israeli officials and Russian media have said. She had been flying from New Delhi to Tel Aviv.

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Issachar pleaded not guilty to the drug smuggling charges but didn't deny that the cannabis in her bag was hers, the Mediazona news website reported.

Prosecutors had requested that she be sentenced to eight years.

Israel condemned the Russian court's sentencing as "heavy" and "disproportionate," saying Moscow had ignored its appeals to handle the case differently and that Issachar had no criminal record when she was detained.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is working to secure Issachar's release, his office said earlier Friday.

Netanyahu has twice discussed her case with Russian President Vladimir Putin and Israel will "continue to exert every effort to free (her) and return her to her family," it said in a statement.

Russia's state-run RT media channel suggested on Thursday that Issachar might be released if Israel frees Alexei Burkov, a Russian national it detained in 2015. Israel said the United States wanted to extradite Burkov for suspected cybercrimes.

But the statement issued by Netanyahu's office ruled out any such prisoner swap.

This story is being updated.

Reuters contributed reporting.

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