

Officers Launch Flashmob to Demand Freedom for Russia's 'Police Ombudsman'

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Police officers, most of them anonymously, have begun posting their badges or pieces of their uniforms with the hashtags #FreedomToVorontsov and #IAm/WeAreVorontsov. **ombudsment / Vkontakte**

Russian police officers have organized an online flashmob in support of their former colleague, the founder of a popular online community that reports abuse within law enforcement who has been jailed on extortion charges.

Vladimir Vorontsov, who founded the "Police Ombudsman" social media channel, has had his home searched by police twice within a month. Last week, officers [rappelled](#) down his roof, sawed through his door and arrested him on charges of extorting 300,000 rubles (\$3,800) from a former policeman in exchange for not publishing his private photographs.

Police officers, most of them anonymously, have begun posting photos of their badges or pieces of their uniforms with the hashtags #FreedomToVorontsov and #IAm/WeAreVorontsov, the Mediazona news website [reported](#).

“We’re outraged by how the special forces behaved: Vladimir’s wife and daughter were in the apartment,” the outlet quoted Maxim Kuzmenkov, a Moscow police dog handler, as saying.

“Vladimir himself is not dangerous to society,” said Kuzmenkov, one of the few police officers to speak publicly in Vorontsov’s support.

Leonid Kozlov, a Moscow cadet, said it was imperative for other police officers to show their support for Vorontsov “because he had helped many others resolve their problems through publicity.”

“The Interior Ministry structures didn’t like it and decided to shut him down, to put it bluntly,” Kozlov told Mediazona.

“If he helped others, then we must support him purely from a moral point of view.”

Vorontsov denies the charges against him and maintains that they are “revenge for his community’s activities to uphold the labor rights of the police’s rank-and-file officers,” according to the Meduza news website’s translation of his statement in court.

Vorontsov on Monday was transferred from a detention facility to a hospital, his lawyer said, days after an ambulance was called for his high blood pressure but did not take him away.

In April, Vorontsov said that authorities broke down his apartment door to conduct a search on suspicion of publishing “fake news” about a coronavirus outbreak within a military school. Police questioned him as a witness in the case.

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