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Russian Women Strike for Equal Rights

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Russian women in cities nationwide held a strike for equal rights ahead of International Women's Day.

In cities like Moscow, Kazan and Ulyanocsk, protesters called on the authorities to abolish all "repressive, sexist and homophobic laws," to pass anti-domestic violence legislation and to institute laws against sexual harassment in the workplace.

"We planned the strike right before March 8 because International Women's Day is a really big holiday in Russia, but it's also very problematic. It's a farce," said Ayten Yakubova, one of the organizers of the strike. "It's supposedly a holiday to be honoring women when really things are not so great for women in Russia at all."

The March 5 strike is already in its second year and is organized by two organizations: the SotsFem Alternative socialist feminist group and Socialist Alternative, a group that pushes for economic equality. Last year, hundreds joined the strike, with students from 11 universities across the country participating.

Yakubova said the strike itself is an important organizing tool for Russia's feminist activists as it helps unite and rally people with similar views.

"The strike is also so important because you can come together and meet like-minded people who believe in equal rights; it creates a sense of solidarity," said Lilia Murzaeva, another strike organizer.

In Moscow, young people went on strike at the prestigious Moscow State University, as well as the Russian State University for the Humanities. Ksenia, 23, was one of the protesters at the State University of the Humanities and came out to strike in support of feminist values as well as to change the face of politics in Russia.

"In Russia, all that we see is oppression, poverty, and death. We are fighting against this...and for all the rights of working people," said Ksenia.

After the interview ended, Ksenia was forced to pack up her placard and leave campus as people that had previously been threatening her reappeared. She said the group included employees from the Interior Ministry's directorate for combating extremism who were filming protesters as well as an ultra-right wing activist who threatened to call the police on Ksenia and her friend.

"The situation earlier was dangerous, so we will be forced to leave."

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