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Russia Puts Torture Video Whistleblower on Wanted List

By AFP

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Sergei Savelyev says Russian authorities are trying "to shut my mouth." **Ursula Hyzy / AFP**

Moscow on Saturday put a former prison inmate seeking asylum in France on a wanted list after he leaked harrowing videos of alleged rape and torture inside a Russian prison.

According to a notice published on the Russian Interior Ministry's website, Sergei Savelyev — a Belarus national — is wanted in connection with an unspecified criminal case.

Savelyev smuggled shocking footage of abuse out of a jail in the central city of Saratov. Fearing reprisals, he fled Russia in February and last week arrived in France, where he asked for asylum.

While serving 7.5 years for drug trafficking, he worked as an IT maintenance officer, earning access to the prison's internal server and those of other jails, where he found several videos.

He saved them on a USB stick that he hid near the prison exit.

Some of the videos were then published by the Russian rights groups Gulagu.net, prompting an official probe and the sacking of several officials.

Savelyev said that while the Interior Ministry did not provide details of why he was wanted, he thought it was for "leaking state secrets."

"They are going down the only path they know, the path of force," he said in a video from France published by Gulagu.net.

Russian authorities are trying "to shut my mouth."

"It's a shame that instead of using the time to reform the system and investigate all this terrible evidence we gave them, they are trying to hide the truth," he added.

Torture and sexual violence inflicted on inmates have long been systemic in Russia's vast penitentiary system, prison monitors say, but the videos have cast new light on such abuses.

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