The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Russia Rules Out WNBA Star Griner's Exchange Until Conviction

July 07, 2022



Andrey Nikerichev /Moskva News Agency

Moscow will not discuss swapping basketball star Brittney Griner in a potential exchange with the United States until her formal conviction on drug smuggling charges, Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov said Thursday.

Ryabkov told reporters that were currently "no nominal, formal or procedural grounds to take any further steps" regarding Griner's exchange, the state-run RIA Novosti news agency reported.

"It's clear that the necessary judicial procedures have not been completed," the diplomat added, addressing rumors that Griner could be exchanged for Viktor Bout, a Russian arms trafficker serving a 25-year jail term in the United States.

Griner, a two-time Olympic champion who was detained at a Moscow airport in the run-up to Moscow's invasion of Ukraine in February, faces up to 10 years in prison on charges of smuggling cannabis vape cartridges into the country.

The 31-year-old is due to appear in court for another hearing later on Thursday.

U.S. President Joe Biden, who has written Griner a letter and spoken to her wife, said Wednesday that the WNBA star was "wrongfully detained."

But Ryabkov lashed out at the designation, claiming that the remark reflected the United States' unwillingness to "perceive the world around them adequately."

He also warned that the "hype" surrounding Griner "disturbed" the court process.

"It is not statements of this kind that can help the situation now, but a serious look by the American side at the signals they have received from Moscow through specialized channels," Ryabkov said.

The White House, which has placed its special envoy in charge of hostages on Griner's case, said Wednesday it is "working to secure Brittney's release as soon as possible."

AFP contributed reporting.

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2022/07/07/russia-rules-out-wnba-star-griners-exchange-until-conviction-a78233