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Trial of Russian Artist for Anti-War Supermarket Protest Begins

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Alexey Belozerov (CC BY-SA 4.0)

The trial of Russian artist Sasha Skochilenko, who was arrested in April for an anti-war protest in which she replaced supermarket price tags with information about the death toll in Ukraine, opened at a St. Petersburg court on Thursday.

Skochilenko, 32, who has been held in pre-trial detention for over six months, was charged with spreading "knowingly false information" about the Russian army after she was identified as the source of the stickers during the early months of the invasion of Ukraine.

Skochilenko pleaded not guilty to the charges at St Petersburg's Vasileostrovsky Court on Thursday.

"I do not admit any guilt that I shared deliberately false information," the artist told the judges in a statement at the opening of the trial.

If found guilty, Skochilenko could face up to 10 years in prison under quickly drafted

legislation that introduced wartime censorship to Russia in the wake of February's invasion.

Related article: Russian Artist Faces 10 Years in Prison for Protesting War on Price Tags

Skochilenko, who was included in the BBC's 2022 list of 100 inspiring and influential women from around the world, has been designated a prisoner of conscience by Amnesty International.

Skochilenko allegedly swapped out price tags in popular Russian supermarket Perekrestok for information about the Russian missile strike on a drama theater in the occupied Ukrainian city of Mariupol in March.

In an interview with independent Russian media outlet Mediazona, Skochilenko spoke of the dire conditions she had been held in during her confinement as well as a number of health problems that saw her transferred to a medical unit.

"There is terrible overcrowding in the cells in the building, up to 20 prisoners can be accommodated there," Skochilenko said.

If convicted, Skochilenko will be the latest person to have fallen foul of Russia's military censorship law. Last week opposition politician Ilya Yashin was sentenced to eight-and-a-half years in jail by a Moscow court on similar charges.

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