

Russia Jails Anti-War Journalist 6 Years for 'Fake News'

February 15, 2023



Journalist Maria Ponomarenko at the Leninsky District Court of Barnaul. **Alexander Lizratov / Kommersant**

A Russian court has sentenced a Siberian journalist and activist to six years in prison for spreading so-called “fake news” about the war in Ukraine.

Maria Ponomarenko, a journalist for the RusNews outlet, was arrested in April for publishing information about the Russian bombing of a theater in southern Ukraine’s Mariupol. The Kremlin denies responsibility for the air strike, which is believed to have killed hundreds of civilians, despite numerous eyewitness accounts.

The Leninsky District Court in the Altai region city of Barnaul found Ponomarenko, 45, guilty under Russia’s wartime censorship laws and handed her a six-year prison sentence, [RusNews reported](#) Wednesday.

The court also banned her from performing journalistic work for the next five years.

Prosecutors had requested a nine-year prison sentence for Ponomarenko.

“It’s enough to open the Constitution and read it to prove my innocence,” Ponomarenko [said](#) in her final court statement Tuesday.

“No totalitarian regime has ever been as strong as before its collapse,” she said in the defiant last word.

Ponomarenko was [hospitalized](#) and given an inpatient psychiatric examination last summer. She later [attempted](#) suicide in protest of her pretrial detention.

Ponomarenko is among nearly [150 people](#) to have been tried under Russia’s law banning the spread of “knowingly false information” about the army which was passed shortly after the invasion of Ukraine.

Sharing information that does not follow the Kremlin’s narrative of its “special military operation” in Ukraine is punishable by up to 15 years in prison.

The law is part of a wider wartime crackdown that has seen hundreds of independent journalists and Kremlin critics flee the country to evade prosecution.

Original url:

<https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2023/02/15/russia-jails-anti-war-journalist-6-years-for-fake-news-a80230>