

Give Me a Chance To Be a Mother

By [Lilia Chanyshcheva](#)

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Liliya Chanyshcheva **Team Navalny**

Lilia Chanyshcheva, the former leader of jailed opposition politician Aleksei Navalny's team in Russia's republic of Bashkortostan, gave the following address to court on Monday. Prosecutors have called for Chanyshcheva, 41, to be sentenced to 12 years in jail on extremism charges and a verdict is expected in the coming days. The Moscow Times has translated her statement into English.

Dear ladies and gentlemen! My fellow citizens! Supporters!

My criminal case is political. That is why I do not think of myself as someone on trial for committing a crime. I am a politician, a woman who is being persecuted by men who are her opponents. Their names are Vladimir Putin and [the head of the Bashkortostan republic] Radiy Khabirov.

A politician is also a professional. For me, admitting guilt is like a teacher admitting she is a teacher or a doctor admitting she is a doctor.

I am not alone in my political profession. I have, as I have said, opponents. In order to be able to judge my activities, it's important to know the context. Here it is:

Under Khabirov, civil activists and environmentalists in Bashkortostan have been attacked; the regional public organization Bashkort was declared extremist; the politician [Airat] Dilmukhametov was jailed along with [Anton] Orlov, chairman of the union of medical workers, and the lawyer [Alexander] Voitsekh; the deputy [Dmitry] Chuvilin was arrested. It has become unsafe for everyone in Bashkiria because Khabirov used force, including against women who were expressing their civic position.

Compare our actions. On our side: petitions, publicity, complaints, participation in peaceful rallies and public hearings. In response: surveillance, searches, kidnapping, arrest and imprisonment. They forcibly removed us from public hearings, threw paint on our cars and filed lawsuits to make us pay millions in compensation for the wages of police officers who were sent to work at our rallies.

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Meanwhile, Khabirov tried to sell Bashkortostan's natural resources to oligarchs, closed hospitals and underpaid doctors, got kick-backs from government purchases and forced the residents of the republic to overpay for housing and utilities. Once our region was on a par with Tatarstan. Now, the results are there for all to see: there are twice as many poor people in Bashkortostan as in the neighboring republic.

When I was preparing my final statement, I read the "last words" of ten people: Yevgeny Roizman, [Vladimir Kara-Murza](#), Dmitry Ivanov, Alexei Gorinov, Andrei Pivovarov, Ivan Safronov, Vladimir Vorontsov, Yuri Zhdanov, [Ilya Yashin](#) and, of course, Alexei Navalny.

These are all strong and intelligent men whom Putin has convicted in the one-and-a-half years that I have been in prison. But Putin has not spared women either: journalist Maria Ponomarenko was given six years in prison, artist Alexandra Skochilenko is awaiting trial, theater directors and playwrights Yevgenia Berkovich and Svetlana Petriychuk are in detention, artist Yulia Tsvetkova was tried for several years and politician Yulia Galyamina has been neutralized. And how many more talented and courageous women whose names we don't know have been put in jail for their political views?

Even after all this, ex-Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev attends a legal forum and laughs about the fact that there are less than 25% women in the Russian government — less than in the Egyptian government. Does this mean that there is no place for women in politics in our country? Or does access to this profession depend on your political views? Isn't this discrimination? Have the men in power decided to add bars to the windows of houses that already have glass ceilings?

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My political rights and the rights of my fellow citizens have been consistently violated. This

shows that Putin has long wanted to eradicate any dissent and create hostility between the people and the government for the sole purpose of retaining power in [presidential elections in] 2024. But Putin is synonymous with corruption, low wages and pensions, a worsening economy and rising prices. Putin is synonymous with war! And it has already touched everyone!

Answer this question: are you better off now than you were 10 years ago? Is it easier for you to go to the store than it was 10 years ago? Do you feel safer than you did 10 years ago? If your answer is no — take action! You can make a difference.

Your Honor! You are not only a judge, but also one of the voters in my district. During the trial, I told you about my successes. Support me as a politician, as a woman, and I will do everything I can to end the executive branch's illegal pressure on you. I will continue to fight corruption and lawlessness in our republic.

Your Honor! You are not only a judge and a voter, but, as the trial has shown, you are a person with your own views. If you put me in jail for 12 years, I will be too old to bear a child. Give me a chance to be a mother.

Thank you for your attention.

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