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Russian Military Detains Deserter in Armenia – NGO

December 11, 2023



The Russian 102nd Military Base is a Russian military base in Gyumri, Armenia. **RG72 / CC BY-SA 4.0**

Updated to add quote from Setrakov's relative.

Human rights activists have raised alarm over the detention of a mobilized Russian soldier on charges of desertion in Armenia, saying the move amounts to a violation of the ex-Soviet republic's sovereignty.

Russian military police in Armenia detained Dmitry Setrakov, who fled the country to avoid serving in the Russian military, the Helsinki Citizens' Assembly-Vanadzor said Sunday.

Setrakov, 39, is currently being held at a Russian military base in the northern Armenian city of Gyumri after being apprehended on Dec. 6-7, the organization said.

He faces five to 10 years in prison if convicted of leaving his military unit during Russia's mobilization period.

Setrakov fled Russia on Nov. 30 with the help of Idite Lesom ("Get Lost"), a project that helps

Russians avoid military service in Ukraine, after he refused to fight.

“He was mobilized and didn’t want to fight so we helped him leave the country,” Idite Lesom head Grigory Sverdlin told The Moscow Times by phone, adding that Setrakov had spent several months in hiding from the military before turning to the project.

"The kidnapping of a person on foreign territory is an extraordinary occurrence," Sverdlin said.

The people who detained Setrakov had identified themselves to him as members of Armenia’s military police “but were obviously Russian soldiers and security services,” Sverdlin said.

A relative of Setrakov’s, who asked to be anonymous given the sensitive nature of his detention, told The Moscow Times on Tuesday that his whereabouts were still unknown.

“I know that he is in Gyumri and that’s it,” the relative said, adding that the Russian officials had still not contacted the family.

“We had a call on Dec. 7, they introduced themselves as the Armenian military police and gave Dima the phone. He said that he was alive, in Gyumri, and he was detained,” the relative said.

Embed:

> Дмитрия Седракова, который не хотел воевать и не побоялся дезертировать, мы вывезли 30 ноября из России.
>
> а 7 декабря с нами связалась его жена — его задержали на территории Армении и удерживают на российской военной базе в Гюмри. по сути, это похищение. максимальная огласка pic.twitter.com/NWgjjrrSQP
>
> — Григорий Свердлин (@grinogij) December 10, 2023

According to Idite Lesom, Setrakov called his wife and told her that he was detained in Gyumri and was being held at the Russian military base No. 120.

The Helsinki Citizens’ Assembly-Vanadzor said it “condemns the abduction of and the illegal activities against a person under the Republic of Armenia’s legal protection by Russian military police in the Republic of Armenia’s territory.”

It argued that Russian authorities violated Armenia’s sovereign power to restrict a person’s liberty on its territory.

“This case is very alarming for the human rights community, because, essentially, this is a kidnapping of a person on the territory of another country,” said lawyer Anastasia Burakova, the head of Kovcheg, an international group supporting Russian emigres and anti-war activists.

“We are closely monitoring the situation in Armenia and we are in direct contact with local human rights activists,” Burakova told The Moscow Times. “This incident is lawlessness. Neither the Russian military nor Russian law enforcement agencies have the jurisdiction to carry out search operations or detentions on the territory of other countries.”

Burakova said there is little possibility that activists could successfully lobby for his release.

“But unfortunately, the prospects aren't very promising, given the fact that he is at the Russian military base and the possibilities of legal assistance are very limited,” she added.

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