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Navalny Makes First Court Appearance After Arctic Prison Transfer

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Alexei Navalny. **Alexandra Astakhova**

Jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny has appeared in court via video link for the first time since being transferred to a maximum-security prison colony in Russia's Arctic, the independent news website Mediazona reported Wednesday.

"A tear is running down my cheek. I'm so glad to see you all," Navalny said from a jail cell.

The jailed activist sued the prison administration in central Russia's Vladimir region, where he had been held for fraud before being transferred to the Arctic prison colony, accusing it of unlawful disciplinary penalties.

Hearings were originally scheduled for early December when Navalny's allies sounded the alarm about his unexplained disappearance and concerns over his safety.

Related article: Navalny Placed in Solitary Confinement After Transfer to Arctic Prison

Navalny's lawyers said late last month they had finally found him at the remote "special regime" prison colony in the Yamal-Nenets autonomous district village of Kharp, nicknamed "Polar Wolf."

He later conveyed a message to supporters on social media, saying he had undergone a difficult 20-day transfer to Kharp.

Navalny argued in court Wednesday that the Vladimir region prison administration illegally placed him in solitary confinement at a time when he was on trial for "extremism," adding that he should have been transferred to pre-trial detention, according to Mediazona.

The 47-year-old anti-corruption campaigner and his supporters dismiss his 19-year "extremism" sentence as politically motivated.

The Vladimir region court rejected Navalny's lawsuit against the prison administration.

Between arguments, Navalny noted that his living conditions at the IK-3 prison colony in Kharp were "better than at IK-6 in Vladimir."

He also joked about the IK-6 administration throwing a "naked party" after his transfer, according to Mediazona, which reported that the prison administration's lawyer laughed in response.

Navalny's next court hearing on the issue of the prison's failure to deliver letters from family and supporters is scheduled for Feb. 2.

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