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Veteran Rights Activist Orlov Transferred Before Prison Sentence Begins

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Russian human rights activist Oleg Orlov in court. **Sergei Karpukhin / TASS**

The Russian human rights group Memorial said Monday that its co-founder Oleg Orlov was transferred to a detention center in southwestern Russia before his prison sentence was set to enter into force.

A Moscow court in February found Orlov, 71, guilty of "discrediting" the Russian army after he openly criticized the invasion of Ukraine, sentencing him to two-and-a-half years in a medium-security prison. The activist has appealed the verdict against him.

Under Russian law, a prison sentence does not enter into force until a higher court issues a ruling on an appeal.

Memorial said in a statement that authorities on Thursday night moved Orlov from Moscow to a detention center in the southwestern city of Samara without notifying his lawyer or wife.

"We have appealed the verdict... therefore, it will have entered into legal force only after an

appellate court, which could theoretically commute the sentence or acquit," the activist's lawyer Katerina Tertukhina said.

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An unnamed lawyer at Memorial said Russian prison authorities sometimes justify the premature transfer of prisoners as a way to help ease overcrowded detention centers.

According to the lawyer, the judge who sentenced Orlov granted visitation rights to his wife Tatiana on Thursday.

"This is a terrible humiliation... It's hard to interpret this as anything other than revenge or a desire to 'spite' Orlov," the Memorial lawyer said.

Tatiana Orlova requested that the authorities not transfer her husband until his sentence enters force due to his poor health.

Memorial described the transfer, which is standard practice for many prisoners in Russia, as a "torturous" process in cramped spaces.

"[Orlov] is very tired. He still doesn't know where and on what grounds he's being transferred. It's possible that Samara is not the final destination," Memorial wrote.

Russia's Justice Ministry designated Orlov a "foreign agent" 11 days ahead of his sentencing.

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