

Memorial Designates Bashkir Activist Alsynov 'Political Prisoner'

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Fail Alsynov. **SOTA / AFP**

A prominent Bashkir activist whose imprisonment earlier this year [sparked](#) mass protests was [designated](#) a political prisoner by the Russian rights group Memorial on Wednesday.

Fayil Alsynov was [sentenced](#) to four years in a penal colony in January on charges of “inciting interethnic hatred.” However, many observers believe he was targeted for campaigning against illegal gold mining in his native republic of Bashkortostan.

Memorial described the case against the activist as “blatant political prosecution,” adding that Alysonv enjoys “the strong backing from the public” in Bashkorostan.

“The high level of support for Fail Alsynov is evidenced by the mass demonstrations... [after] his sentencing, which attracted several thousand people,” the rights group said.

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During his trial, authorities claimed Alsynov “negatively assessed” migrant workers from the North Caucasus and Central Asia and “violated” their “human dignity” by referring to them as “black people” in a speech he gave last year.

Alsynov denied the accusations and insisted his words were “gravely mistranslated” from his native Bashkir language by a government-affiliated linguistic expert.

“Fail Alsynov’s public speech... was devoted to the worsening environmental situation in the Baymasksy district of Bashkortostan, caused by the ongoing exploration and mining of minerals there,” Memorial said.

Thousands gathered outside the court in the southeastern town of Baymak when the initial verdict in Alsynov’s case was handed down in January. Riot police used smoke grenades, tear gas and batons to disperse the crowds.

The January rallies in support of the Bashkir activist, which were some of the largest in Russia since the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, have been followed by sweeping repressions against those who participated in them.

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