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Russian Playwright, Director Face 6-year Jail Terms for 'Justifying Terrorism'

By AFP

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Theater director Zhenya Berkovich and playwright Svetlana Petriychuk. **Dmitry Serebryakov / AP / TASS**

A Russian prosecutor has sought six-year jail terms for a playwright and a director on trial for "justifying terrorism" in a 2021 play about women marrying jihadists in Syria, lawyers said Friday.

Director Yevgeniya Berkovich and writer Svetlana Petriychuk are standing trial at a military court over their play about Russian women lured to marry Islamic State (IS) militants.

The lawyers representing the director, Advokaty Pro Lyudei, wrote on Telegram that the prosecutor at the closed-door trial in Moscow had asked on Thursday for Berkovich, 39, and Petriychuk, 44, to each be sentenced to six years in a penal colony.

The next trial hearing will be on Monday.

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The women's arrest in May last year sent shockwaves through Russia's artistic community, which has faced mounting pressure from the Kremlin since Moscow sent troops to Ukraine in early 2022.

Their trial opened in May this year and last month a judge ruled that hearings would continue behind closed doors at the request of the prosecution.

Their play, "Finist The Brave Falcon", revolves around Russian women groomed online to join IS and then tried for terrorism on their return home.

It was awarded two Golden Mask awards, Russia's top theater prize.

Berkovich has also written poems criticizing the Russian military offensive in Ukraine.

Her supporters have said they believe she may be being punished for those verses.

Human rights group Amnesty International has said the pair are "being targeted simply for exercizing the right to freedom of expression" and called for their immediate release.

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