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U.S.-Russian Woman Jailed 12 Years for Donating Money to Pro-Ukraine Charity

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Ksenia Karelina. **Donat Sorokin / TASS**

A court in the Ural Mountains region of Yekaterinburg sentenced U.S.-Russian citizen Ksenia Karelina to 12 years in prison for "treason" on Thursday after she allegedly donated around $50 to a pro-Ukraine charity.

Karelina was arrested in January while visiting her family in the city of Yekaterinburg. Last week, her lawyer said she pleaded guilty to treason charges during a closed hearing.

"The court found Ksenia Karelina guilty of high treason and sentenced her to 12 years imprisonment at a medium-security prison," the Sverdlovsk Regional Court said Thursday.

Karelina, a 33-year-old ballerina and spa employee in Los Angeles, was accused of donating around $50 to the New York-based charity Razom shortly after Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022.

Russia's FSB security service claimed the money was "used to purchase tactical medical

supplies, equipment, weapons and ammunition for the Ukrainian armed forces."

Razom, which provides humanitarian aid and disaster relief to Ukrainians affected by the war, urged U.S. authorities to demand Karelina's release from Russia.

Treason cases are heard behind closed doors in Russia as the authorities say they deal with sensitive information.

Earlier, the independent broadcaster Sotavision reported that Karelina's case was being handled by the same judge who sentenced U.S. journalist Evan Gershkovich to prison for espionage last month before his release in a prisoner swap.

Washington later on Thursday denounced the sentencing against Karelina.

"It's nothing less than just vindictive cruelty. We're talking about 50 bucks to try to alleviate the suffering of the people of Ukraine and to call that treason is just absolutely ludicrous," National Security Council spokesman John Kirby told reporters.

AFP contributed reporting.

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