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Bashkortostan Court Sentences Kushtau Protester to 9 Years in Prison

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Marat Sharafutdinov. **Video grab**

A court in Russia's republic of Bashkortostan sentenced an activist involved in the 2020 Kushtau Hill protests to nine years in prison, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty reported Tuesday.

Protests broke out at Kushtau Hill, considered sacred by locals, in August 2020 when the Bashkir Soda Company began prospecting work at the site some 1,500 kilometers east of Moscow. Dozens of protesters were arrested and their encampment was destroyed amid clashes with private security guards and riot police.

While most detainees were released, activist Marat Sharafutdinov was arrested again in January 2021 alongside fellow activists Ilnur Kinisarov, Rustam Amanov and Rayil Abkadirov, who were later sentenced to three years in prison.

Sharafutdinov was found guilty of being a member of the outlawed Bashkir national organization, Bashqort, as well as of "plotting hooliganism with motives of ethnic hatred."

The hooliganism charges stemmed from Sharafutdinov's initial arrest in November 2020, when law enforcement arrested around 50 Bashkir activists near Karmaskaly village.

Authorities claimed that the activists were planning a confrontation with members of the local Armenian community. The activists denied the allegations and accused law enforcement officials of using excessive force during the arrests.

Supporters of the four activists have condemned the cases as retaliation for the Kushtau Hill protests — a rare example of successful non-violent protest in Russia. The site was eventually designated a protected natural area.

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