The Moscow Times
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Jailed Gulag Historian Yury Dmitriyev Sent to Punishment Cell, Rights Group Says

By AFP

January 22, 2025



Yury Dmitriyev. **Peter Kovalev / TASS**

Russian prison authorities moved the jailed Gulag historian Yury Dmitriyev to a punishment cell for allegedly breaching exercise rules at the penal colony where he is being held, the rights group Memorial said late Tuesday.

Dmitriyev was sentenced to 15 years in prison in 2021 on a controversial child sex charge his supporters say was punishment for his life's work.

Memorial said that Dmitriyev, 68, had been transferred from his cell on Friday to spend six days in an isolated punishment cell for "incorrectly carrying out morning exercises."

Dmitriyev spent decades locating and exhuming mass graves of people killed under Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin's rule and set up a memorial to them in the republic of Karelia in

northwestern Russia, where he headed Memorial's regional branch.

He faced a series of trials on a number of charges, including sexually abusing his adopted daughter. He pleaded not guilty to the charges.

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Dmitriyev was arrested in 2016 and charged with possessing child pornography over several nude photos of his adopted daughter that he said he took to monitor her growth. A court acquitted him in 2018.

That verdict was later overturned by a higher court, and Dmitriyev was put back on trial on a new charge of forced sexual acts involving a child. In 2021, he was sentenced to 15 years in a high-security penal colony.

Memorial has declared Dmitriyev a political prisoner and says the real reason for his prosecution appears to be "his activity in preserving the memory of political repressions." The group said that Dmitriyev has "not had a single full medical checkup" since his arrest in 2016.

In March 2023, he was sent to a punishment cell for sitting down on his bed during the day because a medicine made him dizzy, Memorial said.

As part of a crackdown on civil society, Russia labeled Memorial a "foreign agent" and ordered it to dissolve in 2021. It now operates without legal status as a rights organization.

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