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Jailed Reporter Maria Ponomarenko Sentenced to Nearly 2 More Years in Prison

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Maria Ponomarenko. **SOTAvision**

A judge in Siberia has sentenced journalist and activist Maria Ponomarenko to an another year and 10 months in prison for allegedly assaulting a prison guard, marking the third criminal conviction against her in as many years.

Ponomarenko, 47, is serving two prison sentences for spreading "fake news" about Russia's invasion of Ukraine and allegedly assaulting prison guards. She denies both accusations.

The legal rights NGO Perviy Otdel reported Wednesday that a judge at the Rubtsovsk City Court in the Altai region again found Ponomarenko guilty of inflicting "non-life-threatening harm on a prison employee."

Taking into account her prior sentence, Perviy Otdel said the court set Ponomarenko's cumulative sentence at two years and three months in a medium-security prison.

Prosecutors had requested a three-year prison sentence for Ponomarenko, who is a mother of two.

It was not immediately clear how many years in total Ponomarenko would end up serving in prison. Her lawyer previously said she was not expected to be released until 2028 under the two previous sentences. The latest prison sentence is likely to extend that date.

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Lawyer Dmitry Shitov claimed Ponomarenko had attempted suicide three times within a 10-day period last summer in protest against prison conditions. She had staged several hunger strikes in prison and her mental health has deteriorated due to "torture-like" conditions, Shitov said.

Amnesty International accused prison authorities in the Altai region of placing Ponomarenko in solitary confinement on spurious grounds multiple times and denying adequate health care, including for her deteriorating mental health.

In 2023, Ponomarenko was convicted for publishing reports on Russia's bombing of a theater in Mariupol, a port city that Russia captured after a long siege. Ukraine and its Western allies blamed Russia for the death of hundreds of civilians in the attack, which Moscow denies.

A different Altai region court sentenced her to an additional year and 10 months last year after finding her guilty of "disrupting the work of a penal colony."

The Memorial human rights group recognizes Ponomarenko as a political prisoner.

AFP contributed reporting.

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