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Russian Orthodox Church to Seek Leniency for Woman Jailed Over Easter Cake Hookah

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Ksenia Belousova in court. **@moscowcourts / Telegram**

The Russian Orthodox Church plans to petition a Moscow appeals court for a lighter sentence for a woman recently imprisoned after making a hookah out of a traditional Orthodox Easter cake.

A judge sentenced Ksenia Belousova to three years and 25 days in prison last month after finding her guilty of offending the feelings of religious believers. The charges stemmed from a video she posted on Instagram showing a hookah with a bowl shaped like a *kulich*, a traditional Russian Easter pastry.

She was initially sentenced to 200 hours of community service, but the judge combined the conviction with a three-year probation sentence that Belousova received in August for drug possession to mandate real prison time.

Vakhtang Kipshidze, a representative for the Russian Orthodox Church, said church officials were initially "surprised" by the length of the prison term.

"But it was actually pretty simple to find out that it was a legal issue... because she committed a repeat offense," Kipshidze told the broadcaster RTVI.

Related article: Moscow Woman Jailed 3 Years for Easter Cake Hookah Video

Nonetheless, Kipshidze said the Russian Orthodox Church will ask an appellate court for leniency since Belousova sent a letter expressing remorse.

"On our end, we intend to petition the appellate court to reduce her sentence. That's standard practice in our church," he said.

Kipshidze went on to defend Russian laws for criminalizing offending the feelings of religious believers as "perfectly reasonable" and "justified," adding that the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) has historically protected religious sentiments in its rulings.

Russia exited the ECHR and stopped honoring its decisions after being expelled from the Council of Europe following its full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

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