

main Orthodox cathedral in February 2012. They were convicted and sentenced to two years imprisonment. Amnesty described the outcome as a “bitter blow for freedom of expression” in Russia.

Samutsevich was later released on probation, but appeals by Alekhina and Tolokonnikova have been turned down. Alekhina and Tolokonnikova will both have their parole appeals heard by the regional higher courts this week.

Help free Pussy Riot at: www.amnesty.org/freepussyriot

Background

Members of the Pussy Riot music collective filmed themselves miming a protest song about Vladimir Putin and Russian Orthodox Church officials in Christ the Saviour Cathedral in Moscow on 21 February 2012, with group members covering their faces with balaclavas. Maria Alekhina, Nadezhda Tolokonnikova and Ekaterina Samutsevich were later arrested and charged with “hooliganism on grounds of religious hatred”, a crime that carries a maximum sentence of seven years imprisonment in Russian law.

The three women were denied bail and were held in custody for four and half months until their trial. During this time Amnesty recognised the three as “prisoners of conscience”, saying they should not be facing criminal charges and calling for their immediate release.

The Pussy Riot protest was one of a number of protests against Vladimir Putin in the run-up to Russia’s presidential elections in March 2012. The Russian government has since introduced several new restrictions on freedom of expression, assembly and association, including a law amending the Criminal Code to allow for up to three years imprisonment for “public actions aimed at insulting religious feelings”.

Note to editors

A copy of the open letter and the full list of supporters:
Amnesty International open letter of support to Pussy Riot:

Dear Masha and Nadia,

As the one-year anniversary of your trial approaches, we are writing to assure you that, around the world, people are both still thinking of you and working for your release. Although you were the most visible of the protesters, we know that there were many other young people who have suffered in the protests, about whom we are also very concerned. But, in many ways, through your imprisonment, you have come to represent them.

Many artists voiced their concern when these charges were first brought against you, we had every hope that the authorities, in dealing with you, would show some understanding, a sense of proportion, even some of the wonderful Russian sense of humour, but none of the above were forthcoming.

The impact of your shockingly unjust trial and imprisonment has spread far and wide. Especially among your fellow artists, musicians and citizens around the world, including the many parents who feel your anguish at being separated from your children. While understanding the sensitivities of protesting in a place of worship, we ask that the Russian authorities review these harsh sentences, so that you may return to your children, your families and your lives.

The right to freedom of expression and dissent is a legitimate one and essential in any kind of democracy. You have been accused of what could be described as 'a victimless' crime, but in our opinion, in a just society, there can be no crime where there is no identifiable 'victim'.

Your strength, bravery and fearlessness are an inspiration to us all.

Yours in solidarity,

Bryan Adams, Adele, Alt-J, Laurie Anderson, Animal Collective, Anti-Flag, Arcade Fire, Arch Enemy, Archive, Joan Armatrading, Joan Baez, Beardyman, Jeff Beck, Yasiin Bey, björk, Rubén Blades, Billy Bragg, Jackson Browne, Peter Buck, Tracy Chapman, Chase & Status, The Chemical Brothers, Neneh Cherry, The Clash, Coldplay, Lily Rose Cooper, Dido, Django Django, Melissa Etheridge, Siobhan Fahey, Paloma Faith, First Aid Kit, Franz Ferdinand, Foster the People, fun., Peter Gabriel, Bob Geldof, Kim Gordon, Debbie Harry, PJ Harvey, Don Henley, The Hidden Cameras, Niall Horan, Billy Joel, Sir Elton John, Ke\$ha, Angelique Kidjo, The Knife, Mark Knopfler, Tom Lehrer, Sean Lennon, Annie Lennox, Lykke Li, Sir Paul McCartney, Romy Madley-Croft, Madonna, Zayn Malik, Stephen Malkmus, Marina & the Diamonds, Johnny Marr, Massive Attack, Mike Mills, Moby, Thurston Moore, Tom Morello, Alanis Morissette, James Morrison, Graham Nash, Kate Nash, Youssou N'Dour, Karen O, Yoko Ono, Clock Opera, Ozzy Osbourne, Liam Payne, Peaches, Joe Perry, Phoenix, Rain Phoenix, Portishead, Portugal. The Man, Cat Power, Radiohead, Bonnie Raitt, Rise Against, Patti Scialfa, Scissor Sisters, Paul Simon, Sleigh Bells, Patti Smith, Esperanza Spalding, Bruce Springsteen, Dave Stewart, Sting, Michael Stipe, Harry Styles, Neil Tennant, Louis Tomlinson, Pete Townshend, K T Tunstall, U2, Eddie Vedder.