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Russian punk singer refused sentence deferral

Today's decision by a Russian court not to allow Pussy Riot member Maria Alekhina to defer serving her sentence to a later date compounds the injustice already meted out to the imprisoned punk singer, Amnesty International said today.

"Today's court ruling is a further travesty of justice. The three Pussy Riot singers should not have been prosecuted in the first place. Today's decision has proven again that the Russian authorities are uncompromising in their suppression of freedom of expression," said David Diaz-Jogeix, Europe and Central Asia Deputy Programme Director.

"Maria Alekhina and Nadezhda Tolokonnikova should be released, immediately and unconditionally, while the suspended sentence of Ekaterina Samutsevich should be overturned."

Maria Alekhina together with Nadezhda Tolokonnikova and Ekaterina Samutsevich, three of the members of the all-female group Pussy Riot, were charged with "hooliganism on grounds of religious hatred" after they sang a protest song in Moscow's main Orthodox cathedral in February 2012.

All three were subsequently sentenced to two years imprisonment in a penal colony but later Ekaterina Samutsevich was given a suspended sentence on appeal.

Perm Region's Berezniki City Court in the Ural, where Maria Alekhina is serving her sentence, denied the deferral on the grounds that her being a young mother had already been taken into account when passing her initial sentence last year. At the moment Maria Alekhina's young son is being looked after by her mother. A similar bid was launched in October 2012 by Nadezhda Tolokonnikova.

"Today's verdict is in line with the suppressive policies of the Russian authorities, stifling dissent in any form," said Diaz-Jogeix

"For one stunt, clearly within their right to freedom of expression, the three punk singers had to endure months of humiliation and hardship in detention – something that continues for Maria Alekhina and Nadezhda Tolokonnikova."

Amnesty International believes that the trial of the Pussy Riot singers was politically motivated, and that they were wrongfully prosecuted for what was a legitimate – if potentially offensive – protest action.

The organization considers Maria Alekhina and Nadezhda Tolokonnikova to be prisoners of conscience, detained solely for the peaceful expression of their beliefs.

Today Amnesty International members together with other Pussy Riot supporters around the world have been conducting support actions in solidarity with Maria Alekhina's bid for release.