

Beat: News

'Pussy Riot' member Maria Alyokhina freed under amnesty law

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USPA News - Pussy Riot member Maria Alyokhina, who was jailed nearly two years ago after performing an anti-Kremlin song at Moscow's main cathedral, was released from jail Monday under an amnesty law approved by Russian lawmakers last week. Her fellow band member is expected to be released soon.

Alyokhina left the penal colony in Russia's Nizhny Novgorod region at about 9:10 a.m. local time on Monday, said Pyotr Verzilov, the husband of another Pussy Riot member. "With her lawyer Pyotr Zaikin, she is now driving to the railway station from which she will travel to Moscow by train," he told the Interfax news agency. Three members of the Russian punk rock protest group were arrested and charged with hooliganism in March 2012 after they and two others performed a song in Moscow's Cathedral of Christ the Savior. Their protest was stopped by church security personnel, but within hours they finished a music video entitled "Punk Prayer - Mother of God, Chase Putin Away!" The three members were convicted of hooliganism motivated by religious hatred in August 2012 and each sentenced to two years of imprisonment. Yekaterina Samutsevich was freed in October 2012 following an appeal that saw her sentence being suspended, while the two other members involved in the act were able to flee Russia. Nadezhda Tolokonnikova remained imprisoned by early Monday afternoon, but both the Federal Penitentiary Service and Verzilov said she is expected to be released later in the day. Zaikin told Interfax that Alyokhina will meet with human rights activists upon her arrival in Moscow, but it was not immediately known whether she planned to speak with reporters. Monday's release was possible after Russian lawmakers approved a sweeping amnesty law last week that opened the way for Alyokhina and Tolokonnikova, in addition to thousands of other prisoners, to be released on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the Russian constitution. The pair's sentences were due to end in March. Earlier this month, Russia's highest court criticized the verdicts of guilt handed down to the Pussy Riot protesters, saying the verdicts did not include proof that they were motivated by hatred towards a social group. The court that sentenced them also ignored their status as mothers with young children, which could have affected the length of their sentence. Russian President Vladimir Putin previously criticized the feminist punk rock group but told reporters in August 2012 that he did not believe they should be judged overly harsh for their act. "But I think that if these young ladies went to, say, Israel and desecrated something there, they would hardly be able to leave that easy," he noted.

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