

Human Rights Boss Joins Russian Rockers' Appeal

Russia's top human rights official has joined a campaign calling for two members of the punk band **Pussy Riot** to be freed from jail.

Vladimir Lukin, the country's human rights commissioner, is backing an appeal against the hooliganism **convictions** and two-year prison sentences handed out to Nadezhda Tolokonnikova and Maria Alekhina last year. The two rockers were among three members of the punk collective who were arrested for performing a protest song against President **Vladimir Putin** at a church in Moscow.

Their bandmate Yekaterina Samutsevich was freed last October when her sentence was commuted, and now Lukin has joined the growing band of supporters backing Tolokonnikova and Alekhina's appeal, which is currently under consideration by officials at **Russia's** highest legal panel, the Moscow City Court Presidium.

According to a report published in Russian newspaper Kommersant, Lukin has written an entry in the appeal papers stating the pair only violated "the internal rules of conduct in the given cathedral" and that there is no proof they planned to cause religious offense. The jail sentences sparked outrage last year, with stars including Sir Paul McCartney, Madonna and Bjork speaking out against the decision.