

U.S. Couple Accused of Abusing 3 Russian Girls

September 08, 2010

The  **Moscow Times**

A U.S. couple is seeking a plea agreement after being charged with abusing three girls adopted from Russia, a defense lawyer said.

Edelwina Leschinsky, 44, and her husband, Steven Leschinsky, 43, were arrested in March after an investigation by Colorado child welfare authorities in which the girls — aged 12, 13 and 14 — described being physically abused by their adoptive parents.

Russian children's ombudsman Pavel Astakhov identified [the girls](#) as Alexandra, Anna and Oksana. They were adopted [five years ago](#) from Mineralnye Vody, a city in the Stavropol region, Vesti state television reported.

According to a U.S. police affidavit, the girls, who were interviewed after the 12-year-old came to school with a black eye, said the Leschinskys forced them to perform hundreds of push-ups and sit-ups a day and to hold themselves over a board with nails protruding from it.

The girls also told authorities that their adoptive parents spanked them with belts and pieces

of wood and made them slap one another in the face for punishment.

A Colorado court on Tuesday postponed proceedings against the couple until Oct. 7 after their lawyer said the plea negotiations were under way.

"We do anticipate a disposition [final settlement] in this matter," lawyer Alex Garlin said during a brief hearing.

Prosecutors declined to discuss the case with reporters at Tuesday's hearing.

"These are good, hard-working people who, with the purest of intentions, adopted three Russian sisters," Garlin said in a statement.

"Some extremely difficult adjustments for the children caused great stress within the family, [and] parental discipline occurred, but we disagree with various things written in the police affidavit," he said.

The couple are charged with child abuse and contributing to the delinquency of a minor. The girls have been removed from the home.

Astakhov accused U.S. authorities on Tuesday of neglecting their responsibilities by failing to inform Russian officials about the case. He denounced authorities' actions as "an outrage," Interfax reported.

Russia has all but frozen adoptions to U.S. parents since a woman in Tennessee put a 7-year-old boy she had adopted from Russia on a plane back there in April, saying he had violent tendencies and psychological problems.

Astakhov and other Russian officials are now hammering out a child adoption agreement with Washington that is expected to be finalized within weeks.

Some Russian politicians have called for a halt to all adoptions to foreign parents in light of several high-profile cases in which Russian children were badly abused or killed. Most recently, St. Petersburg Governor Valentina Matviyenko called for a ban on foreign adoptions from local orphanages and urged local families to take the children instead.

"I see how many cruel incidents have happened. We don't need any foreign adoptions in St. Petersburg," she told a City Hall meeting Tuesday, Interfax reported.

Perhaps the best-known foreigner to adopt children in St. Petersburg is former German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder, who adopted a girl in 2004 and a boy in 2006.

(MT, Reuters)

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