

Libya Asked to Free 2 Detained Russians

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Moscow said Tuesday that it is seeking the release of two Russians on trial in Libya for allegedly aiding troops of former Libyan President Moammar Gadhafi.

The defendants, Alexander Shadrov and Vladimir Dolgov, are being charged with a group of roughly 20 Ukrainians and three Belarussians.

"The whole group has been accused of repairing military equipment that was used by the Gadhafi regime for 'annihilation of the Libyan people,'" Russia's Foreign Ministry said in a statement Tuesday.

Colonel Ali Al-Shaikh said they are also accused of "preparing launches of surface-to-air missiles whose goal was a NATO aircraft protecting civilians," Belarussian news site Telegraf.by reported.

It is unclear what punishment the charges might carry.

According to earlier reports, the defendants were captured by al-Kakaa, a rebel brigade, on allegations of modernizing tanks for Gadhafi's troops.

All of them have been in jail for almost eight months, but the trial's preliminary hearing started just last week. All the defendants reportedly came to Libya to work in the oil industry.

In March, Foreign Ministry ombudsman Konstantin Dolgov criticized the Russians' protracted detention.

"Two Russian citizens are being illegally held in Libyan custody," Dolgov said. "We consider this situation unacceptable. It must be resolved with the constructive participation of the Libyan authorities."

All the defendants were relocated to a police office with "much worse conditions" last month, according to the ministry.

The Foreign Ministry and Russian Embassy in Tripoli have been coordinating with colleagues in Ukraine and Belarus to demand better living conditions for the defendants and win their release, the ministry said.

"Russia's diplomats regularly visit the [jailed] Russians, supplying them with food, clothes and medical assistance," the ministry said.

A Ukrainian woman detained with the defendants was freed and returned to Ukraine at the end of last month, along with two other citizens.

A spokesman for Ukraine's Foreign Ministry, Oleksandr Dykusharov, told Interfax that more than 5,000 foreign citizens, including Europeans, have been held in Libyan prisons.

Gadhafi held power for 42 years, but he was overthrown by the rebels and shot dead in October.

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