

Russia Pushes Ahead With Case Against Ukrainian Pilot Savchenko

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Pro-Ukrainian activists in Israel demonstrating for Savchenko's release.

The lawyer of Ukrainian pilot Nadezhda Savchenko, accused of complicity in the deaths of two Russian journalists, said Saturday that Russia's Investigative Committee has overturned a request to drop the charges.

Lawyer Mark Feigin tweeted a photo of the committee's letter, which said Savchenko's legal team had been unable to provide "irrefutable proof" of her innocence.

"The present accusation of carrying out a particularly grave crime is confirmed by an aggregation of objective evidence: victims' testimonies, witnesses, the inspection of the bodies, ... and other investigative materials," the letter read.

A Moscow court is set to rule on Tuesday whether to grant the Investigative Committee's request to extend Savchenko's pretrial detention until May.

Savchenko, 33, was the first woman to serve as a military pilot in Ukraine, and in October she was elected to the Ukrainian parliament in absentia.

Russian authorities have accused Savchenko of abetting the killings of Russian journalists Igor Kornelyuk and Anton Voloshin, who died in mortar fire in eastern Ukraine in June 2014.

Savchenko was detained by pro-Russian rebels soon after the incident and taken to Russia to face charges.

Late last month Savchenko was also charged with illegally crossing Ukraine's border with Russia. Her lawyers maintain that she was actually abducted by pro-Russian separatists and taken to Russia against her will.

Feigin, who defended the members of female punk rock group Pussy Riot in 2012, has said client had already been in the custody of pro-Russian separatists when Kornelyuk and Voloshin were killed.

The new charges came in the aftermath of Russia's announcement that it would boycott the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) after having been stripped of voting rights within the assembly.

Russia said at the time that it was withdrawing its invitation to PACE monitors to visit Savchenko, who is currently detained at Moscow's high-security Lefortovo Prison.

Savchenko's health has steadily declined since she embarked on a hungry strike in December, Feigin said. In an open letter to President Vladimir Putin, published on the website of the liberal-leaning Ekho Moskvy radio station in January, Feigin wrote that Savchenko told him she wanted to die.

U.S. State Department spokeswoman Jen Psaki said last week that Russia had been treating Savchenko "in an appalling manner," being barred from seeing her family and left in solitary confinement for long periods.

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