

The Washington Times

Maria Butina denied release from solitary, prompting plea from Moscow in alleged Russian agent case

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November 29, 2018

Russia's commissioner for human rights asked the United States on Thursday to show mercy for jailed gun-rights advocate Maria Butina and release her from solitary confinement.

Tatyana Moskalkova made the plea shortly after a D.C. federal court judge ruled Wednesday evening against releasing Ms. Butina back into general population at a detention center in Alexandria, Virginia, where attorneys for the alleged foreign agent claim she is being arbitrarily isolated from other inmates.

"It is obvious that this kind of attitude towards the person being investigated is not in accordance with the norms adopted in a civilized society, especially in the United States, which traditionally bring the topic of human rights to the fore," said Ms. Moskalkova, 63, a former Russian legislator who was appointed the nation's commissioner for human rights in 2016.

"I hope that the voice of the media and the world community will be heard by the U.S. authorities and will encourage them to show objectivity, mercy, humanism and change the mode of detention of Maria Butina," Ms. Moskalkova said in a statement, according to an English-language translation.

A spokesperson for the State Department referred to law enforcement when reached by The Washington Times, and a spokesperson for the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Columbia declined to comment on a pending case.

Ms. Butina, 30, was arrested in D.C. in July 2018 and has been charged with acting as an unregistered foreign agent. She pleaded not guilty during her initial arraignment, but recent court filings have indicated that negotiations between her defense team and prosecutors are nearing a possible resolution.

Lawyers representing Ms. Butina wrote in a Tuesday court filing that their client was recently removed from the general population at the Alexandria detention center and placed in administrative segregation, or solitary confinement, effectively isolating her from other inmates for 22 hours a day and putting her on path toward a possible mental collapse.

"It is the opinion of the undersigned that prolonged deprivation of human contact and interaction is starting to have a profound psychological impact on Ms. Butina," her attorneys wrote. "Unless the court intervenes, she will continue to be held in this manner and ultimately require the attention of mental health professionals."

U.S District Judge Tanya S. Chutkan denied Ms. Butina's request Wednesday evening, finding serious missteps with respect to her attorneys' efforts.

"Defendant cites no U.S. statute or case law to support her application and has attached no exhibits, declarations or affidavits. The motion merely asserts counsel's understanding, based on hearsay conversations and speculation, as to why the Defendant has been placed in administrative segregation," ruled Judge Chutkan, an Obama appointee.

In a separate filing Wednesday, meanwhile, lawyers for both Ms. Butina and the Justice Department said they "remain optimistic about a pretrial resolution." A status hearing in the case is currently scheduled for Dec. 19.

Established in 1994, the job of commissioner for human rights in the Russian Federation is an independent position appointed by members of the Russian State Duma, or legislature.

Russia is routinely ranked among the worst modernized nations in the world with respect to protecting human rights, with the 2017 edition of the annual Human Freedom Index report published by The Cato Institute, a U.S. think-tank, ranking Russia near the bottom of the list at number 126 out of 159 countries.

More recently, the European Court of Human Rights ruled Tuesday that Russia repeatedly violated human rights laws by discriminating against members of the nation's lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community.