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Russia must immediately free doctor Nadezhda Buyanova, imprisoned for anti-war stance: UN expert

GENEVA – A UN expert today condemned the sentencing of a 68-year-old paediatrician Nadezhda Buyanova to five and a half years in prison by a court in Moscow for ‘anti-war’ remarks during a private medical appointment.

Buyanova was convicted of “public dissemination, for political or ideological reasons, of knowingly false information about the Russian army.”

“It is appalling to sentence a doctor for an unproven private comment in the course of her professional duties,” said Mariana Katzarova, UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Russian Federation. “The rushed trial based primarily on the testimony of a seven-year-old child, is yet another example of sham trials in Russia, targeting individuals simply for their anti-war stance.”

The case began after a complaint in January 2024 by the mother of a boy who accused Buyanova of making derogatory statements about the boy’s father, a Russian army serviceman, killed in the war against Ukraine. The widow claimed that Buyanova called her husband a “legitimate target for the Ukrainian army” and said “Russia is to blame as it is the aggressor” in Ukraine. The court apparently relied on a pre-trial interview with the seven-year-old child, whose advanced phrasing raised concerns about scripted testimony. The trial did not allow for cross-examination of the child’s testimony, undermining its fairness.

Buyanova has rejected the allegations against her. The mother also alleged that Buyanova, born in Lviv, Ukraine, harbours “hatred against Russians.” The doctor replied, “I am related to three ethnicities: Russian, Ukrainian, and Belarusian. I don’t want to have to choose between them.”

Katzarova said that even if Buyanova’s comments were proven, expressing an opinion, especially in a private setting, does not constitute a crime under international standards of freedom of expression.

The case has sparked outrage in the medical community, with over 1,000 doctors signing an open letter calling for Buyanova’s release.

“This case reflects the pattern of widespread and systematic suppression of any peaceful anti-war expression, targeting human rights defenders, political opposition, and ordinary citizens for expressing views challenging State narratives,” Katzarova said. Between 1,372 and 1,700 political prisoners are currently detained in Russia, many for voicing opposition to the war.

In her [report](#) to the UN Human Rights Council in September, the Special Rapporteur called on the Russian Government to cease instrumentalisation of the court system for political purposes and to silence civil society and dissenters. Katzarova’s report called for the immediate release of all political prisoners.

“Buyanova’s case is yet another emblematic case in Russia meant to gag war critics and instil fear among the Russian people. Buyanova must be released immediately and all charges against her dropped. Laws that stifle freedom of expression such as “war-censorship” laws should be urgently repealed,” Katzarova said.

***The expert: Mariana Katzarova, [Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Russian Federation](#)**

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