

Russia lifts house arrest of LGBT activist facing pornography charges

By AFP

The Moscow Times (16.03.2020) – <https://bit.ly/2J7qTiC> – Russia on Monday lifted the house arrest of an LGBT rights activist accused of distributing pornography for posting drawings of vaginas on a body-positive social media page.

Yulia Tsvetkova, 26, has been under house arrest since November in the remote Far Eastern city of Komsomolsk-on Amur, some 6,000 kilometers (3,800 miles) east of Moscow.

Amnesty International said the case was absurd and labeled her a prisoner of conscience.

A district court ruled she can now leave her home but must comply with a travel ban, Tsvetkova said.

“Today they will take off my bracelet,” she wrote on Facebook after the hearing, calling the ruling an encouraging sign.

“The investigation has big plans. But perhaps we had a small victory today,” she said, noting the case had not been closed.

Tsvetkova faces up to six years behind bars over the pornography charges. She was previously fined for violating a controversial Russian law against gay propaganda.

“She still risks a real prison sentence,” Amnesty International’s Russia director Natalia Zvyagina said in a statement after the ruling, calling for “the lifting of all charges against Yulia and an end to her persecution.”

As part of her activism, Tsvetkova hosted lectures for the LGBT community and held classes on sex education, which is prohibited at Russian schools.

She has reported receiving death threats from a homophobic group.

She told AFP earlier that she had maintained a social media page called “Vagina Monologues” for six months as a “hobby.”

She said she believes the authorities are using the pornography charge as a pretext for cracking down on LGBT activists because it is easy to pin on people and carries a long sentence.

The prosecution asked for her house arrest to be lifted because she has still not been charged, reported OVD-Info, a website that tracks detentions at political protests.

It is unclear when the trial will begin.

Her arrest prompted pickets and an online flash-mob where artists posted works of art depicting vaginas.