

Activists Confront Russian UN Envoy Over Anti-Gay Law

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Demonstrators in London holding up posters depicting Putin as Hitler to protest Russia's new legislation.
Lefteris Pitarakis

UNITED NATIONS — Gay rights activists confronted Russia's UN ambassador Thursday and tried to hand over a petition with more than 340,000 signatures urging world leaders to help eliminate anti-gay laws in Russia ahead of next year's Winter Olympics in Sochi.

Ambassador Vitaly Churkin arrived at his residence on New York's Upper East Side in the late afternoon to find 10 activists from the international gay rights group All Out outside the wrought iron gates holding red placards saying: "340,457 worldwide say stop Russia's anti-gay crackdown." Minutes earlier, when they got no answer ringing the bell, they had slipped a CD with the signatures under the gate.

Churkin picked up the CD and told the activists they should go through proper channels and deliver the petition to Russia's UN Mission. But he stopped for about 10 minutes to engage

All Out's co-founder and executive director Andre Banks and insist: "We don't have anti-gay laws. We have laws banning homosexual propaganda among minors."

Banks countered that the word "propaganda" has not been defined and gay people in Russia have been killed and arrested.

"That's not true," Churkin retorted. "No gay people have been killed or harmed because they're gay," and if that were proven it would violate Russia's Constitution, which guarantees equality to everybody "no matter what."

Banks countered that Russian law is being used "in a negative way," citing videos from Russia showing "hate crimes" and "people torturing and bullying kids who are gay."

Russia's new law, recently signed by President Vladimir Putin, imposes fines and up to 15 days in prison for people accused of spreading "propaganda of nontraditional sexual relations" to minors and hefty fines for holding gay pride rallies.

A widespread hostility to homosexuality is shared by much of Russia's political and religious elite, and the law has raised growing concern about gay participation in the Feb. 7-23 Olympic games in the Black Sea resort in southern Russia. Some lawmakers have accused gays of decreasing Russia's already low birth rates and say they should be barred from government jobs, undergo forced medical treatment or be exiled.

The activists had hoped to give the petition to Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, who dined with UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon Thursday night at Churkin's residence, but they arrived too early.

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