

Isinbayeva Condemns Homosexuality at Worlds

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Yelena Isinbayeva speaking at a news conference at Luzhniki on Thursday. **Alexander Zemlianichenko / AP**

Pole vault great Yelena Isinbayeva condemned homosexuality Thursday after criticizing fellow competitors who painted their fingernails in rainbow colors to support gays and lesbians in the face of a new anti-gay law in Russia.

Isinbayeva, who won her third world title Tuesday in front of a boisterous home crowd, came out in favor of the law, which has drawn sharp criticism and led Western activists to call for a boycott of next year's Winter Olympics in the resort of Sochi.

"If we allow to promote and do all this stuff on the street, we are very afraid about our nation because we consider ourselves like normal, standard people," the two-time Olympic champion said in English. "We just live with boys with woman, woman with boys."

"Everything must be fine. It comes from history. We never had any problems, these problems in Russia, and we don't want to have any in the future."

At least two Swedish athletes competed Thursday at Luzhniki Stadium, the same venue that hosted the 1980 Moscow Olympics, with their fingernails painted different colors.

Emma Green Tregaro, who won a bronze medal at the 2005 worlds, posted a picture of her fingers on social media site Instagram, saying "Nails painted in the colors of the rainbow." She followed that with several hashtags, including "#pride" and "#moscow2013."

"It felt right," Green-Tregaro told reporters, adding that she had gotten the idea after seeing a rainbow over the Russian capital. "I wouldn't say it was a protest — more of a statement of what I think."

Swedish sprinter Moa Hjelmer also had her nails painted in the rainbow colors when she ran in the 200-meter heats.

"Some teammates have done the same," Sweden team spokesman Fredrik Trahn said. "The federation has not discussed it. It is all up to the athletes."

The IAAF, the sport's governing body, said both opinions should be respected.

"The IAAF constitution underlines our commitment to principle of nondiscrimination in terms of religious, political or sexual orientation," the IAAF said in a statement. "Allied to this is our belief in free expression as a basic human right — which means we must respect the opinions of both Green Tregaro and Isinbayeva."

Isinbayeva said it was wrong for the Swedes to make such a statement while competing in Russia.

"It's disrespectful to our country. It's disrespectful to our citizens, because we are Russians. Maybe we are different from European people and other people from different lands," Isinbayeva told reporters. "We have our home and everyone has to respect [it]. When we arrive to different countries, we try to follow their rules."

Isinbayeva, 31, is one of the world's greatest pole vaulters. She has set 28 world records in her career and won seven major titles, including gold medals at the 2004 and 2008 Olympics.

She is also slated to be "mayor" of the Olympic Village in Sochi during the games, which run from Feb. 7-23. She was part of the team that helped Russia win the right to host the 2018 football World Cup.

"I hope the problem won't ruin our Olympic Games in Sochi," Isinbayeva said.

"I'm also against this polemic and feel sorry that they try to involve the athletes in such a problem ... because we are not prohibiting athletes from participating in Sochi even if they have no traditional relationships.

"It doesn't matter because ... we don't care about nations, about different skin colors. We are athletes, we are one family, and we work very hard for only one goal, to take a gold medal

in an Olympic Games, to participate in an Olympic games," she said.

"We are against publicity but not, of course, against every choice of every single person. It's their life, it's their choice, it's their feelings — but we are against the publicity in our country, and I support our government."

After winning her latest world title this week, Isinbayeva said she planned to take a break from the sport to have a baby.

It was unclear how many other Swedes or athletes from different countries made similar protests since the world championships started last Saturday. Hjelmer was eliminated from the heats in the 200, but Green Tregaro qualified for the final of the women's high jump and will return to the track on Saturday.

American middle-distance runner Nick Symmonds, who won the silver medal in the 800 meters, voiced his support for gay rights in a blog entry for "Runner's World" before the competition began.

Once in Moscow, Symmonds did not want to comment on the issue, saying, "You're not allowed to talk about it here. I'll get put in jail for it."

The law does not explicitly ban participation in gay pride parades or promotion of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender equality online, but anyone wearing a rainbow flag on the street or writing about gay relationships on Facebook, for instance, could be accused of propagandizing.

Both the International Olympic Committee and FIFA have asked the Russian government for more clarification.

It remains unclear if the new law will be enforced during the Sochi Olympics or the World Cup.

The sparse Moscow crowd at Thursday's morning session of the world athletics championships had plenty to cheer about, with defending world champion Maria Savinova, the quickest of three Russian athletes, to go through to Friday's 800-meter semis.

In a fast heat, Savinova, also the Olympic champion, looked comfortable as she finished third to take the final automatic qualifying spot in 1:59.44. Heat winner Brenda Martinez of the U.S. had the best time of the round with 1:59.39.

There will also be three Russians in Saturday's high jump final with world and Olympic champion Anna Chicherova leading the way.

As was shown by the raucous support given to pole vaulter Yelena Isinbayeva during her emotional victory on Tuesday, the home athletes can expect more vociferous backing in the finals.

Trinidad and Tobago's Keshorn Walcott pulled off a massive upset when he won the Olympic javelin title in London, but a year on, having struggled with injuries for part of this season, he

failed to make the world championship final, finishing 19th in qualifying.

Material from Reuters is included in this report.

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