

Russia Defends Anti-Gay Law in Letter to IOC

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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LONDON — The Russian government assured the IOC on Thursday it would not discriminate against homosexuals during the Sochi Olympics, while defending the law against gay “propaganda” that has provoked an international backlash.

The IOC received a letter from Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Kozak giving reassurances that the host country would comply fully with the Olympic Charter’s provision against discrimination of any kind.

“The Russian Federation guarantees the fulfillment of its obligations before the International Olympic Committee in its entirety,” Kozak said.

However, Kozak did not back down on the issue of the new law, which penalizes anyone distributing information aimed at persuading minors that “nontraditional” relationships are normal or attractive.

The law applies equally to everyone and “cannot be regarded as discrimination based on sexual orientation,” Kozak said. The letter still leaves open the question of what would happen to Olympic athletes or fans if they made gestures that could be considered propaganda.

The law has provoked harsh international criticism ahead of the Feb. 7-23 Winter Olympics in the Russian resort of Sochi. Some have called for a boycott of the games, though U.S. President Barack Obama and British Prime Minister David Cameron have ruled that out.

Kozak’s letter came after IOC President Jacques Rogge asked the Russians for further clarifications on the law and how it could affect the Sochi Games.

“We have today received strong written reassurances from the Russian government that everyone will be welcome at the games in Sochi regardless of their sexual orientation,” Rogge said in a statement. The letter was addressed to Jean Claude-Killy, the French IOC member who heads the coordination commission for the Sochi Games.

It’s still not clear if an athlete or spectator could be prosecuted for wearing a badge or rainbow pin or waving a small flag in solidarity with gay rights. Political gestures of any kind are also prohibited by the IOC.

The issue attracted attention at the world athletics championships in Moscow last week when Swedish high jumper Emma Green Tregaro painted her fingernails in the colors of the rainbow to support gay rights. The gesture prompted Russian pole vault star Yelena Isinbayeva to complain that Green Tregaro was disrespecting Russia.

Kozak said the legislation does not impose any restrictions on sexual orientation, and stressed that the Constitution prohibits discrimination against anyone based on sex, race or religion.

The letter added: “These requirements do not attract any limitations for participants and spectators of the Olympic Winter Games in Sochi on their legal right of residence in the territory of Russia or participation in any events stipulated in the Games program that are contradictory to the Olympic Charter or universally recognized standards of international law on human rights.”

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