

# No Discrimination Against Gays at Sochi Olympics, Lawmaker Says

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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There will be no discrimination against gay people during the Winter Olympics in Sochi next month, a Russian lawmaker said.

Former Olympic speed skating champion Svetlana Zhurova, 42, who is a member of President Vladimir Putin's United Russia party in parliament, said Monday that homophobia was hard to eradicate in Russia but the host nation would stick to the Olympic charter banning discrimination.

Russia has caused considerable controversy in the run-up to the Games with an anti-gay propaganda law that critics say curbs the rights of homosexuals. It has drawn criticism from the West and rights groups and cast a shadow over Putin's \$50-billion showcase event.

"Gradually someone will become tolerant one day, but the common belief here is that a real man cannot be tolerant, so try to change that and I will watch!" said Zhurova, who was named

Olympic Village mayor for the Games by organizers.

"But of course there is the Olympics and the charter says no discrimination is allowed, so why should we, the organizing and host nation, violate the Olympic charter?" she asked.

Zhurova, who described herself as "very tolerant" and who voted for the "gay propaganda" ban in parliament, said: "Everything will be absolutely fine, peaceful, there was never any problem for gays or [lesbian] girls at any Olympics and there will be none this time either."

Putin, who has promoted traditional social values and moved closer to the Russian Orthodox Church after securing a third term in the Kremlin, has said Russia was "not going after" gay people.

Sports Minister Vitaly Mutko said last year it might have been wiser to wait until after the Games to pass the law, which activists say has led to a surge of homophobia and hate crimes against gays. Russia decriminalized homosexuality in 1993.

Athletes at the Feb. 7 to 23 Games may be punished for making statements on the podium against Russia's anti-gay laws or human rights record but can do so at news conferences without fear of sanction, the International Olympic Committee said Monday.

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