Beat: Entertainment

Russia will enforce anti-gay propaganda law at Sochi Olympics, govt says

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USPA News - Russia will enforce its controversial anti-gay propaganda law during next year`s Winter Olympics in Sochi, the country`s interior ministry confirmed Monday after weeks of conflicting reports. It has caused some officials and groups to call for a complete boycott of the event.

The Interior Ministry, which controls Russia`s police forces, ensured athletes and guests will face no discrimination on the basis of their sexual orientation during the 2014 Winter Olympics. "Consider such claims only as an attempt to undermine the credibility of the upcoming Olympic Games in Sochi," a statement said. But the ministry emphasized the country`s controversial anti-gay propaganda law applies to the entire Russian Federation, and as such will also be enforced during the Winter Olympics in Sochi. "The Ministry of Internal Affairs will, during the Olympic Games, as well as at any other time, operate under Russian law in general and also apply the law on the protection of children from promoting non-traditional sexual relationships," it said. The government further explained that the law only targets those who encourage children to enter into same-sex relationships, and not gays in general. "Law enforcement measures will be applied in accordance with Russian law against persons carrying out such activities," the ministry said. Alexander Zhukov, the head of Russia`s National Olympic Committee, told the RIA Novosti news agency on Monday that gays will be able to take part in the event without any fears for their safety. "If a person does not put across his views in the presence of children, no measures against him can be taken," he said. The International Olympic Committee (IOC) had indicated last month that the Russian government did not plan to enforce the anti-gay propaganda law during the 2014 Winter Olympics. "The IOC has received assurances from the highest level of government in Russia that the legislation will not affect those attending or taking part in the Games," an IOC spokesperson said in a statement last month. The Committee described sport is a human right which should be available to all regardless of race, sex or sexual orientation. "The Games themselves should be open to all, free of discrimination, and that applies to spectators, officials, media and of course athletes," the IOC said. "We would oppose in the strongest terms any move that would jeopardize this principle." Reports that Russia may enforce the controversial law during the Winter Olympics had raised international concern in recent weeks, with some pro-LGBT groups, officials and celebrities calling for a boycott of the event. But others, such as British Prime Minister David Cameron and U.S. President Barack Obama, said a boycott would not be helpful. "I want to just make very clear right now [that] I do not think it`s appropriate to boycott the Olympics," Obama said at a news conference last week. "We`ve got a bunch of Americans out there who are training hard, who are doing everything they can to succeed. Nobody is more offended than me by some of the anti-gay and lesbian legislation that you`ve been seeing in Russia." The 2014 Winter Olympics are scheduled to take place from 7 to 23 February in Sochi, a city on the Black Sea coast of Russia.

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