

LGBT RIGHTS IN RUSSIA

THE ISSUE: IN 30 SECONDS

Have you heard about the recent anti-LGBT propaganda laws that were passed in Russia? The Russian government has recently enacted a law which bans “propaganda” regarding “nontraditional” sexual orientations with fines, jail time, and even deportation. With the 2014 Olympics in Sochi, Russia rapidly approaching, these new laws pose a threat LGBT athletes (and fans) who intend to attend the Games.

THE ISSUE: AN OVERVIEW

Russia's decision last year to end the adoption of children by gay and lesbian parents drew a lot of attention. But just last month, the country passed a broader law that bans "propaganda" having to do with "nontraditional sexual relations." Any citizen or foreigner visiting Russia can be fined, detained and deported for violating the law. Already, there have been documented arrests, clashes between LGBT advocates and police, and cases of anti-gay violence that would be referred to as hate crimes in the U.S.

In August, a group of Dutch filmmakers were arrested and detained for interviewing LGBT individuals in a Russian town about their life in a society which severely discriminates against them. Activists and supporters around the world have begun to boycott Russian products, such as pouring vodka into gutters in NYC. With a history of intolerance (homosexuality was only decriminalized in 1993), Russia is using this new law not only to silence outspoken activists, but also to punish the use of LGBT symbols such as the display of the rainbow flag.

In response to the recent Russian legislation, the IOC states: “The International Olympic Committee is clear that sport is a human right and 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. We would oppose in the strongest terms any move that would jeopardise this principle.” Though the Russian government has assured the IOC that this legislation will not affect the participants of the Sochi Olympic Games, many still fear the possibility of discrimination and possible violence against LGBT athletes and fans. A top Russian government official has been quoted as stating that even though athletes and guests attending the Olympics would be treated “with maximum hospitality,” they would be expected to obey Russia’s laws. (<http://www.olympic.org/news/ioc-statement-on-recent-russian-legislation/206969>)

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is banned under the anti-propaganda legislation?

The law includes stiff fines and jail time for Russian citizens who "propagate" homosexuality to minors. This could include hand-holding and other public displays of affection, participating in rallies, displaying the rainbow flag or other pro-LGBT symbols, and broadcasting positive news stories about LGBT people. (<http://www.ebar.com/news/article.php?sec=news&article=68988>)

What is the global community doing to protest or resist the legislation?

Calls for action – ranging from boycotting Russian goods, to calling for the relocation of the Olympic Games to its previous location in Vancouver – have been circulating across the globe. Though one petition may not fix the generations-old discriminatory policies against “non-traditional” couples in Russia, the global outcry may help move the cause forward, especially challenging this legislation during the Games in Sochi. The petition which we are signing today asks the International Olympic Committee (a respected global organization) to take a stronger stand against Russia’s anti-gay laws.

THE NEED

This legislation threatens to disrupt the LGBT community not only within the borders of Russia, but beyond to the global community of Olympic athletes and fans. With just six months to go before the torch reaches Sochi, activists from all over the world are racing to protect participants, and the greater Russian population, from the consequences of this discriminatory legislation.

COMMUNITY PARTNERS

Petition to the IOC: <https://www.allout.org/en/actions/russia-attacks>

In the news: <http://www.cnn.com/2013/08/01/world/europe/russia-gay-rights-controversy>

The Loft Gay Center (White Plains): www.loftgaycenter.org

GMHC (NYC): www.gmhc.org

The Audre Lorde Project (NYC): <http://alp.org/>

Sage (Advocacy for LGBT Elders): www.sageusa.org

Trevor Project (Crisis Intervention): www.thetrevorproject.org

CONNECTIONS TO JUSTICE

Justice for Athletes: Olympic athletes are professionals at what they do – often spending a lifetime training to achieve their dream of representing their nation in the Games. With these new laws, athletes may fear for their safety during their time in Sochi – making this law affect a population larger than the one within Russian borders. The anti-propaganda legislation stands in stark contrast to the mission of the Olympic Games, which are open to all, and should be conducted in a manner free from discrimination.

Fighting Discrimination: Russian government officials have declared the law a protection for children against “distorted perception of social equality” between “traditional and non-traditional couples”. Human Rights Watch has noted that “under the guise of protecting children, it will infringe on people's rights to free expression and discriminate against Russia's LGBT community”. (<http://www.cnn.com/2013/08/01/world/europe/russia-gay-rights-controversy>)