

Beat: Vips

Putin says gays welcome at Sochi Olympics despite propaganda law

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USPA News - All guests and participants are welcome during next year's Winter Olympics in Sochi, regardless of their sexual orientation, Russian President Vladimir Putin said during a meeting on Monday. The comments follow outrage earlier this year over the country's controversial anti-gay propaganda law.

Putin made the comments during a meeting with International Olympic Committee (IOC) President Thomas Bach and heads of Russia's winter sports federations. It is the first time Putin explicitly welcomed gays to the sports event, although he previously emphasized that Russia does not discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation. "I assured Mr. Bach that our sportspeople and fans will do everything possible to ensure that the participants and guests feel at home at the Olympics in Sochi no matter what country they are from and no matter what their ethnic background or sexual orientation," Putin said. "I want to stress this point." In August, Russia's Interior Ministry said it would enforce the gay propaganda law during the 2014 Winter Olympics after weeks of conflicting reports, causing some foreign officials and groups to call for a complete boycott of the event. The government emphasized that athletes and guests would face no discrimination on the basis of their sexual orientation. "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," the interior ministry said in its August statement. 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 at the time 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. But it is unclear if the law also applies to the public display of, for example, the rainbow flag that is a symbol of the LGBT movement. Reports that Russia will enforce the controversial law during the Winter Olympics raised international concern in recent months, 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. 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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