

Jacques Rogge
President
International Olympic Committee
Chateau de Vidy
Case postale 356
1001 Lausanne
Switzerland

August 5th 2012

Dear Mr Rogge,

The Gay European Tourism Association is deeply concerned about the possible maltreatment of gay people visiting the Sochi Winter Olympic Games as athletes, members of the wider Olympic family, journalists and spectators. We are also concerned about the safety of non-gay visitors who may express support for gay people while at the games.

The federal law passed by the Russian Parliament in June 2013 bans “propaganda of non-traditional sexual relationships” accessible to minors. The imprecise definition of propaganda has given licence for members of the state security forces and the public to subject gay people to harassment and violence as they go about their daily lives.

It is quite conceivable that members of the Olympic family and spectators could be arrested or assaulted simply for saying that they support gay rights, carrying a rainbow flag or because they are thought to be acting in a gay manner. Just last month four Dutch tourists were arrested for making a film about the life of the gay community in a Russian city. How can a person truly enjoy their time at the Winter Olympic if they are in constant fear that they may be harassed, beaten or arrested just for being themselves?

GETA's research estimates that there are over 22 million openly gay Europeans with an annual spending power of over € 50 billion on travel alone. None of these will feel safe visiting the Winter Olympics in Sochi in the current environment.

We understand that the IOC has been given assurances that the law will not be applied to athletes and spectators during the Winter Olympics. However the Russian Minister for Sport, Tourism and Youth, Vitaly Mutko, has subsequently stated that this will not be the case and the Act will be enforced. The Chairman of the Russian State Duma Committee on Physical Culture, Sport and Youth Affairs, Igor Ananskikh, has also confirmed this position.

The Olympic Charter commits the IOC “to act against any form of discrimination affecting the Olympic Movement.” We believe therefore that there is a clear obligation for the IOC to take positive action in this matter.

We greatly appreciate your recent statement that “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 fear, however, that the violence and harassment currently being meted out to gay people in Russia both by the state and individuals, and potentially affecting members of the Olympic family and spectators, requires more than just words. It merits clear actions to show the world that the IOC does actually act against any form of discrimination affecting the Olympic Movement, as obliged by the Olympic Charter.

We therefore call upon the IOC to act -

- to make clear and highly visible statements demonstrating its opposition to discrimination through creating gay venues; encouraging and supporting gay athletes, team members and spectators to be open about their sexuality; and reasserting the IOC's commitment to act against discrimination;
- to encourage gay athletes to make their presence known and all athletes to show their opposition to discrimination in what they say, what they wear and what they do; and
- to defend the rights of spectators to express their opposition to discrimination in non-violent ways

We fear that failing to take positive action will discredit the Olympic Movement and have implications for future games, including those in Brazil in 2016. As FIFA has recently discovered in Brazil, international organising bodies have now to be much more sensitive to the concerns of people outside their sport.

GETA would be happy to discuss this issue with you and your colleagues and help to work towards a situation where the Winter Olympics can take place in an atmosphere that clearly upholds the Olympic Charter commitment to acts against discrimination affecting the Olympic Movement.

I look forward to hearing from you.

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Cc Christophe De Kepper, Director General, IOC