

Gay Rally Banned Over Mental Health

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Moscow once banned gay rallies as "satanic." Now the city's fathers says gays must be kept out of sight because a public gathering might "damage the psychological health" of children.

City Hall has rejected a request by gay rights activists to stage an "educational rally" about the history of attitudes toward homosexuality in science and literature, Interfax reported Thursday. The May 28 rally on Bolotnaya Ploshchad was to be followed by a march along Myasnitskaya Ulitsa and a rally on Ploshchad Revolyutsii.

But City Hall said the event would violate Russia's international obligations to protect the rights of children because it "may impact psychological health and inflict moral damage on children and teenagers who were to become unwilling witnesses of the event," said GayRussia.eu, a web site run by the event's organizers.

City Hall also complained that the event would obstruct traffic in the area.

At the same time, city authorities approved a 3,000-member rally that will speak against "sexual perversion" and call for prison terms for gays on Bolotnaya Ploshchad on May 28, GayRussia.eu said.

City Hall said it feared that clashes would erupt if both rallies were authorized, according to the web site.

Despite the ban, gay activists plan to proceed with their rally and file a court appeal, gay rights activist Nikolai Alexeyev said Thursday, Interfax reported.

"All responsibility for possible disorder in downtown Moscow on May 28 will lie with the city authorities and Mayor [Sergei] Sobyenin personally," Alexeyev told GayRussia.eu two days earlier.

Alexeyev did not specify the time of the gay event, in line with the activists' regular policy of keeping city officials in the dark about their plans to prevent the police from disrupting rallies.

The City Hall has rejected requests for gay pride rallies on various pretexts since 2006, and former Mayor Yuri Luzhkov denounced them as "satanic." The European Court of Human Rights ruled three previous refusals illegal in April.

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