

Jesse Jackson: Russia Must Tackle Racism Before World Cup

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GENEVA — Reverend Jesse Jackson believes that Russia will be unable to ignore incidents of racist abuse in football stadiums as it prepares to host the 2018 World Cup.

The civil rights leader, speaking to The Associated Press at its office in Geneva on Wednesday, said "racism in the field of soccer can't be ignored because it is so visible."

"These global events put the spotlight on how racism is viewed," Jackson said.

Earlier, Jackson referred to Russia's issues during his speech at a United Nations event marking International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

He highlighted an incident Sunday when a banana was thrown at Congolese defender Christopher Samba, who is black, after a league match away at Lokomotiv Moscow.

Samba, who joined Anzhi Makhachkala from English Premier League club Blackburn last month, threw the banana back into the main grandstand.

His Anzhi teammate Roberto Carlos, a member of Brazil's 2002 World Cup-winning team, also had a banana thrown at him during a match against Krylya Sovetov last June.

"Clearly, the visibility of these incidents puts Russia on the defensive and challenges the need to invoke a deterrent against these languages and these actions," Jackson said.

Sports, Tourism and Youth Politics Minister Vitaly Mutko has said Russia will work hard to combat discrimination among fans.

"Of course it's bad, and Russia will fight against such manifestations of racism," said Mutko, who is a member of FIFA's executive committee.

Alexei Sorokin, chief executive of the 2018 organizing committee, said he believed that Russian pride in staging the competition would help "eradicate" any prejudice.

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