

Putin Awards Large Families in Kremlin Palace

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President Putin stands with a family awarded with the Order of Parental Glory at a Kremlin ceremony Saturday.

President Vladimir Putin awarded parents of large families at a ceremony in a luxurious Kremlin palace over the weekend, celebrating families with as many as 13 children.

The parents, who traveled with their families from eight regions, including Khabarovsk in the Far East, the Komi republic in the north and Ingushetia in the south, received the Order of Parental Glory during the ceremony in the spacious Alexander Hall in the Grand Kremlin Palace on Saturday, the Kremlin said in a statement.

"Each of you made a conscious choice in favor of a large and happy family," Putin said. "This step requires tremendous spiritual and physical strength."

One family that received the award had adopted eight of their twelve children.

"It was unexpected to receive your invitation, Vladimir Vladimirovich, but certainly we are

very pleased that our work as parents has been recognized at this level," family matriarch Tatyana Morokova said at the ceremony, adding in an interview with Channel One that she tells her adopted daughters it is as if she "gave birth to them herself."

Putin also said he had signed off on a national strategy for children's interests through 2017.

The practice of awarding the "hero mothers" of large families also existed during the Soviet era, though the practice was discontinued in 1991.

The current award was decreed by Dmitry Medvedev shortly after he became president in 2008. It is given to parents with four or more biological or adopted children who have created "socially responsible families with a healthy way of life," according to the decree. It comes with a one-time reward of 50,000 rubles (\$1,500) and makes the families eligible for certain social benefits from the governments of their respective regions.

The awards come as Russia tries to prop up sagging demographics that have nonetheless made a small climb recently, with demographic data from the first three months of 2012 indicating a 6.5 percent increase in births and a 3.3 percent decrease in deaths from the same period during the previous year.

Putin has made increasing the population from the current 143 million to 154 million by 2050 a central part of his election strategy, banking on measures like providing financial and other support for families with more than two children and by raising migration into Russia by 300,000 people a year.

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