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St. Pete Activists Sue Madonna for Supporting Gays

By Nikolaus von Twickel

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The plaintiffs argue that Madonna, pictured here during a 2008 tour, insulted Orthodox believers by trampling a cross and asking fans to show support for the gay community.

A group of right-wing activists in St. Petersburg has filed a $10 million lawsuit against Madonna, claiming that the pop star's Aug. 9 concert promoted homosexuality and offended Orthodox believers.

The suit, which demands 333 million rubles ($10.4 million) in moral damages, was filed and accepted by the city's Moskovsky District Court, Alexander Pochuyev, a lawyer for the plaintiffs, told Interfax on Friday.

He said the lawsuit targeted three parties: the singer, the venue and the firm Petersburg Music Industry, which organized the concert.

The nine plaintiffs in the case include the Trade Union of Russian Citizens, an ultra-patriotic

organization led by writer Nikolai Starikov, and the nationalist People's Council movement, according to Starikov's website.

They argue that Madonna insulted Orthodox believers by trampling a cross and asking her fans to raise pink bracelets worn on their arms to show support for the gay community.

While Madonna did speak in favor of gay rights at the concert, the claim that she stepped on a cross at the concert had not been made before.

The report said the plaintiffs provided video evidence of their accusations. The footage had not been made public available as of Friday.

Pochuyev, the lawyer, refuted criticism that the lawsuit represents a step back to the Middle Ages by saying that the plaintiffs had chosen a "civilized and modern" way of defending their rights by suing.

"Nobody has burned anybody at the stake — there is no inquisition," he told Interfax.

Earlier this year, St. Petersburg adopted a controversial anti-gay bill that stipulates fines of up to 500,000 rubles ($15,700) for the promotion of homosexuality among minors.

Vladimir Milonov, a municipal lawmaker from United Russia who authored the law, said after the concert that Madonna violated the ban and called for her to be punished.

Daria Dedova of the Trade Union of Russian Citizens told Interfax that her organization had asked prosecutors on Aug. 13 to punish Madonna and the concert's organizers. Investigators have said they would look into the accusations, but no charges have been made public.

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