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Sochi Seeks to Exterminate Strays Before Olympics

By Anya Aseeva

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Sochi residents are furious about a city tender for a company to make the streets safer ahead of next year's Winter Olympics through the "disposal" of stray dogs and cats.

City authorities have published a tender offering 1.7 million rubles for "work on catching, selection and disposal of stray animals (dogs and cats)."

The winner of the tender will catch some 2,028 animals from 2013 to 2015, RBK daily reported Wednesday.

State Duma Deputy Sergei Krivonosov, who represents the region including Sochi, said that killing animals was the fastest way to solve the problem but added that he disapproved of the chosen method.

"I believe that it is more humane to develop animal shelters," he told RBK daily. "But the fact

is obvious that the animals shouldn't be on the streets. We have a responsibility toward the international community."

Dmitry Vyatkin, deputy chairman of the State Duma Constitution and State Affairs Committee, said that no final decision would be made until the public reaches a consensus on the issue.

Around 50 people gathered in central Sochi on Saturday to protest against the inhumane treatment of animals, the Caucasian Knot news agency reported.

The activists gathered 500 signatures demanding that city authorities allocate land for an animal shelter for the strays.

"Unfortunately, the attitude toward domesticated animals is wild in the Olympic capital," Anna Vechkayeva, the head of Dobromir charitable organization told the agency, adding that animals are killed in view of passers-by, including children.

She said that her organization has tried to create a shelter for homeless animals for seven years, and that each new mayor has promised to provide land, but to no avail.

Meanwhile, Emilia Smirnova, head of Sochi branch of the federal veterinary agency, said that cruel treatment against exotic animals was also endemic.

"The situation with domestic, stray and wild animals in Sochi is out of control," she told Caucasian Knot. "Photographers bring tiger cubs, lion cubs, monkeys, baby crocodiles and snakes for seasonal work to Sochi. They knock their teeth out, trim claws, poison them with sedatives, and beat them so they don't bite."

She said that animals of all kinds can carry life-threatening diseases.

Five to 10 Sochi residents seeks medical assistance daily after being bitten by stray dogs and cats, Caucasian Knot said.

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