

Russian Gay Rights Activists in U.S. Call for Sochi Boycott

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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WASHINGTON – Gay rights activists from Russia and the former Soviet republics living in the U.S. are trying to convince athletes and spectators not to go to the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics.

The group is calling for a boycott of the games, saying the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community is not safe in Russia — and they hope even those who are not gay will support the ban.

"LGBT people in Russia are scared, they live in fear, and we want people to be aware of the issue. If they feel strongly about human rights, they should boycott the Olympics in Sochi," said Nina Long, co-president of the Russian-speaking RUSA LGBT organization based in New York.

"We really want the LGBT community to know it's unsafe to travel there," she said in an

interview with RIA-Novosti.

A statement from the International Olympic Committee did little to ease her concerns, Long said.

The committee told RIA-Novosti in a statement that the IOC had a long commitment to non-discrimination against Olympic athletes, adding that "athletes of all orientations will be welcome at the games."

"They have to put up the statement like that, otherwise it's an international scandal, but it's a lie ... it's just to make it hush-hush and nice on some international level," Long said.

RUSA LGBT has several hundred gay members from Russia and surrounding countries of the former Soviet Union who live now in the New York area, Long said. The group is planning to march and hand out flyers with information about the Olympic boycott in New York's upcoming annual Gay-Pride Parade, scheduled for June 30, which will feature a Russian float for the first time.

Long and others say the issue of gay rights in Russia and CIS countries is more urgent now than ever before, with a growing conservative movement across the region that has led to new anti-gay laws and a growing homophobic environment.

Laws that forbid the spreading of propaganda for non-traditional sexual relations to minors started in local communities but grew to larger cities like St. Petersburg in 2012, and passed Russia's lower house just last week.

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