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FIFA Awaits Russian Answer on Anti-Gay Law

By The Moscow Times

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ULRICHEN, Switzerland — FIFA President Sepp Blatter expects a reply within days from the government in Russia, the 2018 World Cup host, after requesting clarification of its law prohibiting gay "propaganda."

Blatter said he asked "by letter and by personal contacts" up to President Vladimir Putin for details about the legislation that has provoked an international furor ahead of the 2014 Sochi Olympics.

"The office of Mr. Putin has promised to me that they will send all these documents in the first days of September," Blatter said Sunday. "And I have also asked the Swiss Embassy to look and to help us to obtain the correct versions of that."

Russia's law prohibiting promotion of "nontraditional" sexual relations has been fiercely denounced by activists and criticized by U.S. President Barack Obama.

FIFA joined the IOC in asking Russia how the law would apply during their events, and if athletes and fans face discrimination.

"For the time being, we have received only protests and demands from our football, sports or Olympics people. I have received nothing officially from the Russians," said Blatter, who is also an International Olympic Committee member.

FIFA legal statutes state that discrimination is "punishable by suspension or expulsion" for individuals in football or member federations.

"When you speak with the Russians, they don't speak about discrimination, they speak about protection [of minors]. That is different. I said, 'So please give me the evidence that you are protecting somebody and not discriminating,'" Blatter said on the sidelines of his annual charity football tournament in his family's home village.

Blatter intends to bring up the issue at an Oct. 3-4 meeting of the 27-member FIFA executive committee, which includes Russian Sports Minister Vitaly Mutko.

Blatter said he expected to meet with Mutko on 2018 World Cup business ahead of the board meeting in Zurich.

He also offered to help the IOC liaise with Russian authorities, and support the Olympic body's new president who will be elected in a Sept. 10 vote that Blatter will attend in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

"I can help the IOC because they will have a change of president," Blatter said.

Last Thursday, the IOC announced that it had a reply from Russia to clarify how the law would operate around the Feb. 7-23 Winter Games.

"We have today received strong written reassurances from the Russian government that everyone will be welcome at the games in Sochi regardless of their sexual orientation," outgoing IOC President Jacques Rogge said in a statement.

Still, the letter did not address directly what would happen to Olympic athletes or fans if they make statements or gestures that Russian authorities consider to be propaganda.

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