

City Hall Rejects Amnesty Rally for Olympics

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Moscow authorities refused to allow Amnesty International to hold a 15-person rally Sunday, in a move activists said confirmed the poor state of freedom of expression in the country.

In a statement on the organization's website, the group says it had planned to hold a peaceful picket at Pushkin Square to coincide with the arrival of the Olympic torch in Moscow. Amnesty's rally served to remind the public that "problems with freedom of expression in Russia are in direct conflict with the Olympic spirit," the statement said.

Three alternative locations were also suggested for the rally, but City Hall declined the request and instead suggested a remote park.

John Dalhuisen, Europe and Central Asia Program Director, slammed the authorities' decision, asking, "Why have the authorities failed even to consider our proposed alternative sites? Presumably, the answer to this question lies in the actual aims of the picket which was

intended to highlight the authorities' intolerance of dissent."

Dalhuisen said the organization did "not accept the authorities' explanation" and intended to appeal the decision.

The rally would have been held in parallel with the arrival in Moscow of the Olympic torch, which was presented by President Vladimir Putin on Red Square on Sunday night.

Ahead of the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi, there have been repeated calls in the West for an Olympic boycott to protest Russia's recently passed anti-gay "propaganda" law and other alleged human rights abuses.

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