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27 Nobel Laureates Ask Putin to Abolish Anti-Gay Legislation

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Sir Ian McKellen waving a rainbow flag. **Pete Birkinshaw**

A group of Nobel laureates has asked President Vladimir Putin in an open letter to revoke Russia's "gay propaganda" law that critics say has led to increased persecution of gay people in the country.

The letter, co-written by chemist Sir Harry Kroto and actor Sir Ian McKellen and published Monday by The Independent, was signed by 27 Nobel laureates from the fields of science and the arts.

"The letter is written to indicate that many senior members of the international scientific community show solidarity with politicians, artists, sports people and many others who have already expressed their abhorrence for the Russian government's actions against its gay citizens," the letter says.

"Protest is never easy but we hope that by expressing opposition to the new legislation it might be possible to encourage the Russian state to embrace the 21st century humanitarian,

political and inclusive democratic principles which Mikhail Gorbachev worked so hard to achieve," McKellen and Kroto added.

Written less than a month before the Winter Olympics in Sochi begin, the letter is the latest example of the international pressure that is mounting on Russia over violations of gay rights and human rights in general.

McKellen, who signs off in the letter as Henry V/Gandalf, last month said that he was advised by the British government not to travel to Russia because of anti-gay legislation there.

Moscow maintains, however, that the "gay propaganda" law, which was passed last summer, does not encroach on the freedom of adults to make their own choices in terms of sexual relations.

Putin in October moved to dispel fears that gay athletes and spectators could face discrimination at the 2014 Games, telling International Olympic Committee President Thomas Bach that everyone would be welcome in Sochi, regardless of nationality, race or sexual orientation.

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