

Elton John Rebukes Russia's Anti-Gay Law

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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LOS ANGELES — Pop singer Elton John has spoken out against Russia's ban on homosexual "propaganda," saying the law legitimized homophobia and provided legal cover to extremists.

John's 500-word statement released Wednesday comes a month after he performed in the country and three days after President Vladimir Putin said his country was welcoming to gays, citing the popularity of the openly gay 66-year-old singer as evidence.

The law has come under fire from human rights activists as Russia prepares to host the Winter Olympics next month.

During a visit to Moscow in December, John performed a concert at which he condemned the law, and said he was keen to gain a first-hand understanding of its effect on the LGBT community.

"What I heard reinforced all the media stories that have been circling since the propaganda bill became federal law: that vicious homophobia has been legitimized by this legislation and given extremists the cover to abuse people's basic human rights," John said.

"Everyone shared stories of verbal and physical abuse — at work, in bars and restaurants or in the street — since the legislation came into force last June," he said. He added that he would welcome the chance to introduce Putin to gay Russians.

Russia's law bans the dissemination of "gay propaganda" among minors, and has become a focal point of criticism by the West and human rights activists who say the law is discriminatory and represents a crackdown on rights and freedoms under Putin.

Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev defended the law in an interview with CNN and said the Western criticism "has nothing in common with the real situation in our country and with the rights of representatives of sexual minorities."

According to a transcript published on his government's website, Medvedev said Russian gays are not complaining about the law or its effects on the way they are treated.

"Speaking honestly, I have not seen a single appeal, even on the Internet, from representatives of sexual minorities in which they say that their rights are being infringed upon," he said.

Putin has addressed the controversy around the law with journalists several times in the past weeks ahead of next month's Winter Olympic Games in the Black Sea resort of Sochi, a showcase that Russia hopes will burnish its image abroad.

He invoked John as proof that Russians do not discriminate against gays.

"Millions of our people sincerely love him despite his orientation," Putin told foreign journalists on Sunday. Putin also said that he had gay acquaintances and told the BBC that he would "definitely" talk with gay celebrities like John and actor Ian McKellen.

The "Tiny Dancer" singer became a target of the law's supporters last September when a parents' group asked Putin to cancel John's December concerts in Moscow and Kazan. John first performed in the former Soviet Union in 1979.

John, one of the world's most prominent gay celebrities who has two children with his partner, said the law has also promoted misunderstanding and ignorance among the Russian people, and implies that gays are dangerous to children.

"In particular, it is very disappointing that the law explicitly links homosexuality with child sex abuse, which countless studies have shown to be conclusively wrong," John said.

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