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Prosecutors Investigate Children's Books for 'Gay Propaganda'

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Novelist Lyudmila Ulitskaya said that people are entitled to their own opinions of gay relationships.

Prosecutors have opened an investigation into a collection of children's stories edited by acclaimed novelist Lyudmila Ulitskaya, after activists complained they presented a "threat to the cultural values" of Russians by promoting tolerance of gay relationships, a news report said.

Leading the protests against the Lyudmila Ulitskaya Children's Project — a series of 15 books by different authors — were activists from the conservative social movement The Essence of Time, who mounted an appeal for Oryol regional prosecutors to investigate the books, Izvestia reported Friday.

At the center of those objections is a book titled "Our Family and Others," which details the history of homosexual relations and, according to critics, "refers to them in a rather elated way," the report said.

Last week, prosecutors in Oryol called in for questioning the director of the Tolerance Center, Yekaterina Geniyeva, whose organization had donated books from the series to libraries in the southwestern region, Izvestia reported.

Ulitskaya, whose books have won a number of literary prizes and have been translated into two dozen languages, responded by sending a letter to prosecutors, saying the "authors had no intention to engage in the promotion of homosexual relations," Izvestia reported.

"But if you want to know the position of the authors of this series, we all oppose the homophobia that has been unleashed in our country," Ulitskaya was quoted as saying in the letter.

Russia last June passed a law banning gay "propaganda" to minors, and the measure has prompted a flurry of anti-gay comments and several violent attacks across the country.

Ulitskaya told Izvestia that people are entitled to their own opinions of gay relationships, but same-sex households are a reality, and children of gay or lesbian parents need to be protected from bullying.

"Those kids — real, living kids! — are subjected to persecution by their classmates who are brought up to be homophobic," she was quoted as saying.

"The goal of this series is to show cultural diversity and to teach teenagers respect for other people, whose customs are different from those that are familiar for us," she said, adding that several teenagers whose parents are gay have approached her to thank her for the series.

Ulitskaya, who earlier worked as a genetics and biochemistry researcher, began her writing career in the final days of the Soviet Union and has explore sensitive issues in her work — such as gender, religion and the need for tolerance.

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