The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

U.S. Senators Urge FIFA: Don't Let Russia Host World Cup 2018

April 02, 2015



FIFA President Sepp Blatter has resisted calls for a boycott of the Russian World Cup 2018, saying the event is independent of politics.

A group of U.S. senators has written to the international soccer association FIFA, urging it to consider removing Russia as host of the 2018 FIFA World Cup because of its role in the Ukraine crisis and annexation of Crimea.

In a letter dated Tuesday and released on Wednesday, the 13 Democratic and Republican U.S. lawmakers said they "strongly encourage" the Federation Internationale de Football Association, or FIFA, to move the global competition. A copy of the letter was also sent to the U.S. Soccer Federation.

"Allowing Russia to host the FIFA World Cup inappropriately bolsters the prestige of the [Russian President Vladimir] Putin regime at a time when it should be condemned and provides economic relief at a time when much of the international community is imposing economic sanctions," the senators wrote to FIFA President Sepp Blatter.

The lead signers were Senator Robert Menendez, the top Democrat on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and Senator Ron Johnson, the Republican chairman of the foreign relations panel's Europe subcommittee.

Republican Senator John McCain, chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, also signed the letter, as did Senator Richard Durbin, the number two Democrat in the Senate.

But a FIFA representative on Thursday ruled out stripping Russia of its right to host the 2018 World Cup.

''History has shown so far that boycotting sport events or a policy of isolation or confrontation are not the most effective ways to solve problems,'' Fischer told The Associated Press in e-mailed comments.

''We have seen that the FIFA World Cup can be a force for good,'' she was quoted as saying, adding that hosting the World Cup “can be a powerful catalyst for constructive dialogue between people and governments.”

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