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Russian Orthodox Church Unsuccessful in Takeover Bid for St. Isaac's

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St Isaac's Cathedral is St. Petersburg's third most-visited cultural site and listed as a UNESCO cultural asset.

St. Isaac's Cathedral in St. Petersburg will remain the responsibility of the State Memorial Museum after city authorities decided not to transfer it into the care of the Russian Orthodox Church, as the Church had requested, the city governor's spokesman Andrei Kibitov wrote via Twitter on Wednesday.

He published an official letter from the Deputy Governor Alexander Govorunov — acting governor while Georgy Poltavchenko attends the Eastern Economic Forum in Vladivostok — stating that if the cathedral were operated by the Church, the maintenance costs would have to be covered by the city budget, and it is too great a burden in a "tough economic situation."

"Every year the museum spends up to 200 million rubles ($2.99 million) on restoration works and maintenance. It also pays up to 70 million rubles ($1 million) in taxes to the city budget. Urgent restoration works will require 750 million rubles ($11.2 million) — part of which will be budget funding — until 2020," Govorunov wrote in the letter.

If these expenses were laid fully on the city budget, funding for other social projects and programs would have to be cut, the acting governor added, concluding that it would be more rational to keep the cathedral within museum operations.

The letter, according to Kibitov's Twitter account, was sent to the St. Petersburg branch of the Russian Orthodox Church on Wednesday.

The Russian Orthodox Church's request to take over the cathedral was addressed to Georgy Poltavchenko, the governor of St. Petersburg, in late July.

St Isaac's Cathedral is St. Petersburg's third most-visited cultural site and listed as a UNESCO cultural asset. The Soviet government turned the cathedral into a museum, but today the space is periodically used for church services.

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