

Olympics Ban 'Open Discrimination,' Says Putin

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Russian President Vladimir Putin has labeled the ban on Russia's track-and-field team from competing in this summer's Olympic Games as "open discrimination."

The International Athletics Federation ruled out lifting the ban on Russian athletes Wednesday. The track-and-field team is currently barred from competing in all international competitions, including the Olympic Games in Brazil's Rio de Janeiro, following reports of a state-sponsored doping program.

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) ruled Sunday that international sporting federations had the right to exclude Russian sportspeople from the competition, but stopped short of banning the whole squad. Russian athletes who have been found guilty of any doping offense will be automatically unable to compete, the IOC said.

Speaking to around 100 members of Russia's Olympic squad in the Kremlin, Putin claimed that the rulings "went beyond the boundaries not just of the law, but of common sense."

“It [the ruling] is a targeted campaign by short-sighted politicians, who apply double standards to our athletes, which are incompatible with sport and with the fundamental principles of law,” said Putin. He stressed the bans were based on reports that contained no concrete proof.

The total ban on Russian track and field athletes, including those with no history of doping, was “open discrimination” which “threatens to discredit the very principles of equality, fairness, mutual respect and the rights of so-called 'clean' competitors,” Putin said.

The president claimed that victories at the Rio Olympics “would not taste the same” as the absence of Russian sportspeople would lower the intensity of the competition and its appeal to spectators.

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