The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
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Russian Orthodox Church Defends Anti-Abortion Petition

September 28, 2016



Alexander Shcherbak / TASS

The head of the Russian Orthodox Church has defended his support for a total ban on abortion and contraception as "not political."

Patriarch Kirill signed a petition calling for the ban on Tuesday, the Interfax news agency reported Tuesday.

The petition, which was compiled by protest groups “For Life” and “Orthodox Volunteers,” had been approved by a patriarchal commission on family, motherhood and children, the church said in a statement.

The Patriarch signed the petition “as a citizen and a priest,” Church Synod External Relations spokesperson Vladimir Legoid told Interfax. “Any priest would have signed the appeal,” he said.

Legoid maintained that Kirill's decision to sign the petition was in no way a political move,

although the church had "an extremely negative stance" on the issue.

He also denied an earlier statement made by Kirill's press secretary, Alexander Volkov, who claimed the Patriarch had signed a document against the inclusion of abortion services as part of Russian state medical insurance.

Russia's supreme mufti later also came out in support of the petition, the RIA Novosti news agency reported.

The controversy has put a spot light on Russia's increasingly conservative stance on family issues.

In another move which dismayed Russian activists, the county's State Duma officially came out in support of legislation to ban baby box schemes on Wednesday,.

The law, which was put forward by the deputy head of the country's Federation Council, Elena Mizulina, would end the 19 baby box projects around the country.

The controversial scheme allows parents to anonymously and legally leave babies in incubator-like enclosures if they wished to give them up for adoption without the perceived social stigma.

The Russian government claims that the boxes violate the United Nations convention on the rights of the child.

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