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Government Had No Right Banning 'Jesus Christ Superstar' — Putin

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Vitaly Belousov / TASS

Russian President Vladimir Putin says regional authorities had no right to ban the rock opera "Jesus Christ Superstar" in the Siberian city of Omsk.

Putin commented on the reported ban Friday, when Director of the State Theatre of Nations Yevgeny Mironov raised the issue during a meeting of the Presidential Council for Culture and Arts.

When Mironov said that "authorities" had banned the play, Putin asked Culture Minister Vladimir Medinsky if he had played a role in the ban.

Medinsky denied any involvement and said that the Omsk regional culture minister, a former theater director himself, would not support such a ban.

Such a ban cannot be justified, Putin said. The Russian Orthodox Church relates positively or at least neutrally to "Jesus Christ Superstar," and the play had "even received the blessing of

the former Patriarch Alexei II."

The Omsk State Musical Theater cancelled the Nov. 1 performance of “Jesus Christ Superstar” by the St. Petersburg-based Rock Opera theatre troupe after Orthodox activists complained to the mayor’s office.

The official position of the Russian Orthodox Church is to sanction artists whose works are inspired by biblical stories, says representative Vladimir Legoida. However, Orthodox activists have regularly intervened to censor controversial works of art in Russia.

During the Presidential Council meeting, theatre director Mironov promised to prepare for Putin a list of recent attempts to censor performances and art exhibits.

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