

Russian Authorities Rush Transferring St. Isaac's Cathedral to Church

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St. Petersburg authorities are pushing to finalize the transfer of St. Isaac's Cathedral to the Orthodox Church in time for the city's Easter celebrations in April, the RBC news website reported Tuesday.

Officials have ordered cathedral staff to remove all exhibits belonging to the Russian Culture Ministry in time for the Orthodox holiday on April 16, unnamed sources told the news outlet. Despite the order, there is still no official document outlining the cathedral's controversial transfer into Church hands, RBC reported.

The conflict over St. Isaac's Cathedral kicked off in January this year, when governor Georgy Poltavchenko, known for his pro-religious stance, announced that the government-owned building would be gifted to the Church. The cathedral currently acts as a

state museum, but also holds religious ceremonies.

The move divided St. Petersburg, with critics arguing that access to the building would be restricted under church control. Russian conservationists also criticized the decision, claiming the Orthodox Church will be unable to properly maintain the building. Orthodox activists dismissed the concerns by describing the Cathedral as a holy place which should be under the jurisdiction of the Church.

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The Director of the St. Isaac's museum, Nikolai Burov, told RBC that it would be impossible for staff to remove all exhibits by April 16. "We need to get containers [for the exhibits] ready, to prepare a contract with a licensed moving company, and prepare the new space which will house the exhibits.

Only then can we remove them," he said. The museum may also need to conduct tenders if any of the contracts hit a 600,000 rubles (\$10,095) limit, Burov added.

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