

Russia Will Support Its 'Neutral' Athletes At Winter Olympics, Says Mutko

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Sergey Fadeichev / TASS

Deputy Prime Minister Vitaly Mutko has said that the Kremlin will support Russian athletes who decide to compete in neutral uniforms at next year's Winter Games after the country's team was barred for doping violations this week.

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) ruled Tuesday that individual Russian athletes could still participate in the 2018 Games if they prove to a panel that they have been clean. Those athletes, who would compete in neutral uniforms, would not see their country's flag or hear its national anthem at the Games.

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"For us, the interests of the athlete have always been the priority," Mutko was [cited](#) as saying by the state-run TASS news agency on Wednesday. "We supported athletes who decided to

compete under a neutral flag before and we are doing the same now.”

“We need to do everything to make sure our athletes are not subject to any kind of discrimination, and that they are given equal opportunities,” he added.

Mutko said that the IOC’s ruling was unfair to Russia and its athletes, but welcomed the decision to allow athletes to participate.

The committee also banned several officials for life, including Mutko and his former deputy Yury Nagornykh, for overseeing Russia’s state-sponsored doping scheme. But Mutko said that the interests of Russia’s athletes were his top concern.

“I do not want to evaluate the decision of the IOC concerning me personally,” he said.

“This is not the time to be thinking about myself.”

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