

St. Petersburg World Cup 'Diversity House' Shut Down by Landlord

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Former Canadian football player Karina LeBlanc attends an opening ceremony of Diversity House in Moscow (Tatyana Makeyeva / Reuters)

A World Cup anti-discrimination community center has been prevented from opening in St. Petersburg after its landlord pulled out of agreements to host the 'Diversity House.'

Led by the Football Against Racism in Europe (FARE) network, the Diversity House community center for ethnic and sexual minorities was meant to open its doors to the public just as the city hosted its first World Cup match. A collective initiative of several grassroots organizations, Diversity House was created as a safe space for discussions on racism, human rights, and LGBT issues in Russia.

Related article: [World Cup 'Diversity House' to Challenge Racism, Homophobia](#)

The St. Petersburg Diversity House's landlord kicked out the group 12 hours before its scheduled opening on Thursday, project coordinator Alfred Miniakhmetov told The Moscow Times on Sunday.

"The space that was originally intended for us to occupy canceled our agreement. ... we were rudely told to leave," Miniakhmetov said.

He said the move was likely "politically motivated" and sought to "disrupt and discourage our further work."

St. Petersburg hosted its first World Cup match on Friday, which concluded in Iran's 1-0 victory over Morocco.

In Moscow, Diversity House's opening was attended by Russian government representatives and the world football governing body FIFA on Saturday.

Citing past examples of venue owners pulling out of agreements at short notice, Miniakhmetov said "we are quick to adapt, we know where to find space, we will undoubtedly be open."

"[W]e have already found a new space and will just open in a different address," he told The Moscow Times.

Includes reporting by Anton Muratov.

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