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Russian Orthodox Church Slams Proposal to Continue Selling Beer at Stadiums

July 24, 2018

Darren Staples / Reuters

The Russian Orthodox Church has criticized a proposed plan for Russia to relax its ban on beer sales at sports stadiums after a regional official asked President Vladimir Putin to continue sales after the World Cup.

Russia relaxed its 2005 ban on alcohol sales at stadiums for the football tournament this summer in line with football governing body FIFA's regulations. Beer sales in the 11 host cities rose by up to 39 percent during the tournament.

The head of Russia's Muslim-majority Tatarstan republic, Rustam Minnikhanov, asked Putin last week to keep the relaxed policy in place for future football tournaments.

"I'm embarrassed, as a Muslim, to be speaking about beer, but it's out of concern for our Orthodox brothers," he was cited by the Kremlin's website as saying.

But Valery Doronkin, the head of the Orthodox Church's anti-alcoholism coordinating center, told the state-run RIA Novosti news agency Monday that the Church is "categorically opposed to such a proposal."

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"We are against drinking, against drinking alcohol in public places, and against the free sale of alcohol," said Doronkin, siding with the Russian Council of Muftis' earlier opposition to the proposal on religious grounds.

Doronkin cited the high numbers of alcohol-related deaths in Russia, which ranks as the world's fifth-most alcohol dependent country, in pressing for restrictions.

"Alcohol abuse leads to the deaths of adults, children run over by drunk drivers, beaten wives and children and the breakdown of families," he said.

"[To be] Orthodox doesn't mean [to be] drunk; drunkenness is considered a terrible sin," he added.

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