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Officials Impose Short-Term Abortion Ban During Pro-Life Campaign

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Surgeon in the gynecology department of a Ryazan hospital/ Aleksandr Ryumin/ TASS

Hospitals in several Russian regions had imposed a de facto moratorium on abortions during an annual pro-life campaign run by the prime minister's wife this summer.

Faced with the lowest birth rate in a decade, the Russian government seeks to reverse the demographic crisis with a $8.6 billion plan to encourage Russians to have more babies by offering mortgage subsidies and other social programs.

The short-term abortion ban took place in the Far Eastern regions of Primorye and Sakha, as well as Ryazan in central Russia, during the "Give Me Life" campaign run by Svetlana Medvedeva's foundation, the Kommersant business daily reported Saturday.

"By introducing a temporary ban on abortion, we emphasize the need to take care of your health," Svetlana Sagaydachnaya, chief doctor at a Vladivostok maternity home in Primorye, told Kommersant.

The campaign aims to “protect unborn children and promote family values,” Primorye’s chief OB-GYN, Yevgenia Shutka. was quoted as saying.

In Sakha, health officials said they were testing the abortion ban at a Yakutsk perinatal center because the existing awareness campaign was not successful in leading to fewer abortions.

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Closer to Moscow, Ryazan’s health department tied the moratorium on abortions to Russia’s Day of Family, Love and Fidelity.

“It is sad to see a woman voluntarily deprive themselves of the joy of motherhood,” the health department said in a press release. "No abortions are carried out in hospitals during this period [between July 9 and July 15]."

Seven other Russian regions also took part in the annual “Give Me Life” campaign but without the abortion ban, according to the Tjournal news website.

The practice of placing a moratorium on abortions for two to seven days — named the “days of silence” — has been in place since 2011, the Health Ministry’s chief OB-GYN Leila Adamyan told Kommersant.

But Adamyan denied the connection to the maternal health campaign. “This process has no relation to the campaign in the maternity homes,” she said.

Russia’s Health Ministry has asked the regional healthcare authorities to support Medvedeva’s campaign for nearly a decade, but said it did not suggest that regional authorities impose an abortion ban.

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