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Russia Outlaws Animal Cruelty

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Russia has banned petting zoos, animal cafes and the killing of stray dogs and cats under a new law submitted eight years ago that dramatically overhauls rules overseeing the treatment of domestic and wild animals.

Stray dogs roam the streets of many Russian cities and towns, and attacks by — and against — the animals have become increasingly frequent. Animal rights activists have called for humane control measures of stray dogs, as vigilantes around the country have shot or administered poison to kill the animals.

The Kremlin says the new animal-cruelty law is guided by the "principles of humanity" and human safety when handling animals.

The new law — welcomed tepidly by animal welfare activists — bans animal fights, pet cafes and petting zoos that house exotic animals, often inside malls. Bars and restaurants are also banned from housing animals, while wild animals cannot be kept in apartments and private houses.

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"This law covers only one percent of what we'd like to see," Irina Novozhilova, head of the animal rights group Vita, told the RBC broadcaster.

Additionally, the law imposes strict regulations on pet ownership, including walking dogs in designated areas and fining owners for failing to pick up after them. Owners are required to muzzle and put a leash on potentially dangerous breeds, a category that the state will define at a later time.

Senator Andrei Klishas criticized the law in general and the dog-walking provision in particular as "legal chaos."

"After the New Year, people will go out on the street with their dogs and become outlaws," he was quoted as saying by the Kommersant newspaper.

The law prohibits the killing of stray animals, requiring them to be captured — out of sight of children and recorded on cameras for public access — and placed in shelters instead.

So-called "public inspectors" will be in charge of recording violations and sending them to government oversight authorities.

Putin signed the bans into law late last week after they passed both chambers of Russian parliament. The bill was submitted to the State Duma in 2010, including by the current Culture Minister Vladimir Medinsky.

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