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Russia's Prison Service Defends Yoga Against Homosexuality and Riot Claims

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fsin.su

Russian prisoners will continue doing yoga despite religious scholars' claims that the practice could turn inmates gay, Russian prison authorities said on Sunday.

Yoga classes were suspended last month after a conservative lawmaker forwarded to prosecutors a theologian's complaint that yoga could cause prisoners to become gay and start prison riots as a result, according to reports. The classes were first introduced in a Moscow pre-trial detention center for women and the famous Butyrka jail last year.

"No one will be drawn to homosexuality" by yoga and the ancient Chinese breathing technique called Qigong, said Valery Maximenko, deputy head of the Federal Prison Service (FSIN).

"Even if it does, we're in a democracy and everyone has the right to choose their own path," Maximenko told the Govorit Moskva radio station, adding that homosexuality is not a criminal offense in Russia.

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Since introducing yoga in its prisons, the FSIN has found that the practice benefits inmates, Maximenko explained.

"Our research has shown that there were drastically fewer visits to the doctor among those who do yoga. That's a very positive effect," Maximenko said.

The author of the original complaint said his words were taken out of context and accused the journalist who quoted him of a conflict of interest.

Meanwhile, the conservative lawmaker dismissed the story as "fake news" and said on Monday she plans to ask regulators to block the story under Russia's new law against the dissemination of false information, the state-run TASS news agency reported.

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