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Far East Russian Region Fights the Blues With 'Happiness Ministry'

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Kamchatka is Russia's easternmost territory. **Natalia_Kollegova / Pixabay**

Russia's easternmost territory of Kamchatka will establish a so-called "ministry of happiness" to improve its residents' well-being, the region's recently elected governor Vladimir Solodov announced Thursday.

The Kremlin-backed governor said the new agency, officially called the "ministry of social welfare and family policy," is part of ongoing administrative reforms.

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"In short, it's about happiness," Solodov said of the new ministry at a regional forum.

"It's important for me to make this transition away from the 'ministry of the offended and the disadvantaged.' Of course we'll work with people in difficult situations, but we need to make them prosperous and happy, not just deal with the problems that have become

painful."

Solodov, 38, is a Moscow transplant who assumed the post overseeing the region after winning more than 80% of the vote in last month's regional elections.

Solodov's ambitious development goals include taking Singapore's mantle of a major international transport hub, making tourism more affordable and reducing alcohol consumption amid rising rates of alcohol-related traffic accidents.

His establishment of a "ministry of happiness" comes as Russia has seen its position in global happiness rankings fall for two years. Analysts attribute the drop to Russians' lack of observable life improvement and a sense of injustice toward themselves.

"The main criterion for achieving big results to me, albeit somewhat philosophically, is the people's happiness," Solodov said.

"It might sound a little pompous and declarative coming from us, but I think the head of a region can't have any other motivation," he said.

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