

# Russia's Top Documentary Fest Pulls Gay Chechen Film After Threats

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Artdocfest has come under fire and had screenings disrupted in previous years for showing documentaries on controversial topics. **ArtDoc Fest**

Russia's premier documentary film festival has pulled a movie about a gay MMA fighter from Chechnya from its lineup after receiving threats over it.

"[Silent Voice](#)" tells the story of Khawaj, a promising young MMA fighter who is forced to flee his home region to Belgium after his brother finds out he's gay and promises to kill him.

Artdocfest's Moscow organizers [told](#) the independent Novaya Gazeta newspaper Sunday that a man who identified himself as "Suliman" asked festival management to remove the documentary from the festival program.

"People in Chechnya are dissatisfied. If the film is shown, there will be serious consequences," the organizers quoted the man as telling them.

Artdocfest director Vitaly Mansky [said](#) Monday that "due to the circumstances" organizers

have been “forced” to pull the film from the Moscow festival’s lineup.

The St. Petersburg Artdocfest, meanwhile, was forced to cancel their screening of the film after a self-styled “anti-gay” activist filed a complaint with Russia’s consumer protection watchdog, alleging that the festival was promoting “LGBT values” among minors and violating anti-coronavirus restrictions.

Police closed off the St. Petersburg movie theater’s halls Sunday following the complaint from Timur Bulatov, the self-proclaimed head of the “First Moral Russian Front” who is well-known for his ultraconservative, anti-LGBT activism.

Another St. Petersburg film studio where the film was set to be screened as part of the festival had to cancel showings “in order to avoid provocations and the cultural center's closure.”

Artdocfest has come under fire and had [screenings disrupted](#) in previous years for showing documentaries on controversial topics including the war in eastern Ukraine.

Chechnya's strongman leader Ramzan Kadyrov claims that his region is exclusively heterosexual. His iron-fisted rule has faced years of media investigations into the region's alleged imprisonment and torture of LGBT people in secret prisons.

On Monday, film director Alexander Sokurov wrote to the director and chairman of the board of Lenfilm Studios, asking the studio to use its facilities to host the ArtDocFest. “Today it is a matter of principle. A professional studio cannot refuse to support the best festival of documentary film in the country,” he wrote.

*Updated at 16:30 on April 6 to include Sokurov’s statement.*

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