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Moscow Cancels Exhibition on Soviet Dissident Sakharov

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Andrei Sakharov. **Valery Khristoforov, Igor Zotin / TASS**

Moscow authorities have canceled an exhibition dedicated to the 100th anniversary of the birth of Soviet Nobel laureate and human rights activist Andrei Sakharov.

The Sakharov Center had planned to exhibit photographs of the dissident nuclear physicist and quotes from his articles and speeches on central Moscow streets on May 17.

“Sakharov's anniversary is a significant event that was planned and agreed upon with the authorities a year in advance, only to be canceled last minute,” Sergei Lukashevsky, the director of the Sakharov Center told The Moscow Times.

“The Moscow Culture Department told us that it was because the contents of the exhibition were not agreed upon internally, without any further explanation," he added.

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Authorities also told the organizers they couldn't hold an opening ceremony due to sanitary-epidemiological restrictions.

"We consider both the decision itself, whoever made it, and the wording of the refusal to be unconvincing and shameful," The Sakharov Center said in an emailed statement.

The Moscow Department of Culture did not respond to a request for comment.

The Sakharov Center still plans to host an outdoor festival in honor of Sakahrov and other political prisoners on May 21, featuring several prominent artists, musicians and writers, Lukashevsky said.

Sakharov faced persecution from the Soviet state for his civil liberties advocacy. He won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1975, but was not allowed to travel to Oslo to collect it. Sakharov died in 1989.

His turbulent history as a political dissident in the Soviet Union has won him admiration in the West and among Russian intelligentsia. The Sakharov Prize is awarded annually by the European Parliament to people and organizations dedicated to human rights and freedoms.

The issue of political prisoners has gained increased attention in Russia after the jailing of the Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny and the prosecutions of his supporters and opposition activists.

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