The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

War-Themed Indigenous Holiday Sparks Outrage in Russia's Far East

June 21, 2023



Yhyakh celebrations in the Republic of Sakha. **Betta27 (CC BY-SA 4.0)**

Residents of Russia's largest region in the Far East have slammed a move by local authorities to dedicate indigenous holiday celebrations to Moscow's military campaign in Ukraine.

The Republic of Sakha celebrates the Yhyakh New Year annually during the summer solstice, with this year's festivities falling on Wednesday, June 21.

Just days before the celebrations were set to kick off, the mayor of the regional capital Yakutsk announced Yhyakh 2023 would be dedicated to Russian troops fighting in Ukraine and donations toward the country's war efforts would be collected at the event grounds.

"Particular attention will be paid to our honored guests — distinguished participants of the 'special military operation'," Yakutsk Mayor Yevgeny Grigoriyev said, using the Kremlin's preferred term for its invasion of Ukraine.

"I urge the guests and participants of Yhyakh to support our defenders and contribute to [our]

victory!"

Related article: Population Decline in Russia's Small Indigenous Groups Continues – Report

The decision sparked backlash online, with angry comments and dislikes on Sakha-based social media pages from both pro- and anti-war users, according to the news outlet Govorit NeMoskva.

“I won’t attend Yhyakh. I don’t want to desecrate my faith and the traditions of my people,” one user was quoted as saying by the outlet.

Anti-war commenters argued the authorities were attempting to co-opt traditional celebrations to promote Moscow's invasion of Ukraine.

Meanwhile, some war supporters proposed canceling Yhyakh celebrations altogether and to instead send donation proceeds to mobilized soldiers, Govorit NeMoskva reported.

The most high-profile opposition to changes at this year’s festivities came from the locally-popular event host and social media influencer Liza Gazizova, who said she had turned down an offer to host the war-themed Yhyakh.

Gazizova previously criticized Russia’s 2020 constitutional referendum that cleared the way for President Vladimir Putin to seek re-election and remain in power until 2036.

It was not immediately clear whether the online outrage would be reflected in lower attendance numbers at Yhyakh celebrations on Wednesday, but images shared by local media outlets appeared to show half-empty stands at the event grounds.

At last year’s celebrations, Sakha authorities boasted a record-setting attendance of 220,000 people from some 50 countries.

Russians from the republic of Sakha and the country's other ethnic republics have been disproportionately killed on the front lines in Ukraine.

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2023/06/21/war-themed-indigenous-holiday-sparks-outrage-in-russias-far-east-a81577