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Putin Decries 'Ethnic Discrimination' of Russian Athletes

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The International Olympic Committee Headquarters in Lausanne, Switzerland. **Christophe95 (CC BY-SA 4.0)**

Banning Russian athletes from international competitions amounts to ethnic discrimination, President Vladimir Putin said Thursday after Russia's national Olympic body was suspended from the International Olympic Committee (IOC) for violating Ukraine's territorial integrity.

"Thanks to some leaders of the modern International Olympic Committee we've learned that an invitation to the Games is not an unconditional right of the best athletes but a privilege that is earned... through some political gestures unrelated to sports," Putin said.

"The Games themselves can be used as an instrument of political pressure against people who have nothing to do with politics, and as a gross, and in fact racist, ethnic discrimination," he added at a Russian sports forum.

Last week, the IOC suspended the Russian Olympic Committee (ROC) for admitting the regional organizations of four partially occupied Ukrainian territories as its own members.

Related article: World Olympic Body Suspends Russia Over Admission of Ukraine Regional Organizations

Russian troops captured parts of Ukraine's Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson and Zaporizhzhia regions after its February 2022 invasion and Moscow claimed to have annexed these regions last fall.

The IOC imposed sporting sanctions on Russia and its ally Belarus after Moscow launched its full-scale military campaign in Ukraine.

The IOC has suggested allowing Russian and Belarusian athletes to compete as individuals under a neutral flag at the 2024 Olympics in Paris. It is expected to invite other countries to the Paris Games later in October.

ROC chief Stanislav Pozdnyakov expressed confidence earlier Thursday that Russia could be admitted to the 2028 Olympics.

Ukraine has advocated against allowing the participation of Russian athletes, arguing that sport cannot be separated from politics.

AFP contributed reporting to this article.

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