

Get Pregnant, Men Have It Worse: Russian Officials React to Women's Day

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A local firefighter presents flowers to a woman in central Rostov-on-Don on March 8, 2024, International Women's Day. **AFP**

Women's Day has been a national holiday in Russia since 1966, but was celebrated for decades before that. It is a festival where Russians pay tribute to all the women in their lives, from mothers and sisters to teachers and colleagues.

While the United Nations uses International Women's Day to celebrate gender equality and highlight women's rights issues, Russian officials and public figures struck a different tone.

Vitaly Milonov, deputy chairman of the State Duma's Family Committee, was the architect of Russia's infamous law against spreading "gay propaganda." He also has very strong views on what makes women happy.

"I truly believe that the best gift for a woman is a new pregnancy," he told the Govorit Moskva radio station.

The lawmaker also warned couples against drinking too much during their romantic evening together to avoid a "drunken conception". Men should instead "be a man" or, failing that, use flowers to seduce their other half.

President Vladimir Putin echoed Milonov's views in his Women's Day Address. "The most important thing for every woman — no matter what career she chooses and what she is able to achieve in it — is family ... [and] taking tireless care of children," he [said](#).

Putin has already declared 2024 "the year of the family," and promised to implement new measures to reverse Russia's low birth rate.

RT chief editor Margarita Simonyan decided to use the day set aside for celebrating women to highlight the expectations placed on men instead.

"When you are a man, everyone expects you to be responsible," she said, listing how men are expected to take leadership roles at home and in the workplace, as well as being good in bed and willing to defend their homeland.

"When you're a woman," she concluded, "nobody expects that from you. You just do it all silently, and then you go and make borscht."

Bouquets of flowers are a classic Women's Day gift, with tulips, roses and acacia being particularly popular choices.

But Alexander Zhukov, a deputy in the Voronezh City Duma, has other ideas, urging residents to donate to the war instead of buying presents for the women in their lives. "We'll give flowers to women after our victory," he said.

Wives and mothers of mobilized soldiers have emerged as one of the few groups to protest against the war — or at least the poor conditions Russian soldiers face — without incurring a harsh crackdown from the authorities.

Local officials used the day to publicly pay tribute to these relatives. In Lipetsk and Tula, widows were paid 10,000 rubles (\$110). In the Moscow region town of Balashikha, women were offered jobs as dishwashers and paramedics at the Rubin Aviation Corporation, where the monthly salary of 42-47,000 rubles (\$463-518) is lower than the regional average of 79,000 rubles (\$871).

Other tributes were more bizarre. Vyacheslav Frank, mayor of Barnaul in the Altai region, [presented](#) a mother of three children with a yogurt maker after her husband was killed.

Federation Council Chair Valentina Matviyenko used her speech at the All-Russian Women's Forum to thank Putin for opening up "all opportunities" in Russia to women.

However, not all opportunities are open to women as Russian law [forbids](#) them from working in dozens of careers for health reasons.

The feminist media outlet Kosa quickly pointed out that reality for women in Putin's Russia is often far less rosy than the picture Matviyenko painted. In the most egregious example, Russia 2017 [decriminalized](#) cases of domestic violence that result in "minor harm" like small

bruises and superficial wounds.

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