

Toronto Festival Cancels 'Russians at War' Film Screenings Over Threats

By [AFP](#)

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Anastasia Trofimova, director of 'Russians at War'. **TIFF**

The Toronto International Film Festival said Thursday it was pausing all upcoming screenings of the controversial documentary film "Russians at War" after receiving "significant threats."

"We have been made aware of significant threats to festival operations and public safety," festival organizers said in a statement, pointing to reports they received "indicating potential activity in the coming days that pose significant risk."

"This is an unprecedented move for TIFF," the statement added. "Given the severity of these concerns, we cannot proceed as planned."

"Russians at War," directed by Anastasia Trofimova, was first presented at the 81st Venice Film Festival. Trofimova, who studied in Canada, had previously worked at the Kremlin-funded RT news network and then with the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation.

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The film has sparked outrage in Ukrainian cultural and political circles over what critics consider to be a pro-Kremlin film that seeks to whitewash and justify Moscow's full-scale invasion.

Throughout the film, soldiers appear to have little idea of why they have been sent to the front line and are shown struggling to make Soviet-era weapons serviceable. Others chain-smoke cigarettes and down shots of alcohol amid the deaths and wounds of their comrades.

"Russians at War" was to have its North American premiere in Toronto on Friday, followed by additional screenings on Saturday and Sunday.

Canada's Deputy Prime Minister Chrystia Freeland criticized the planned screening in Toronto, saying "there can be no moral equivalency in our understanding of this conflict."

Canadian public broadcaster TVO, which helped fund the documentary, pulled its support for the film and said it would not be airing it. Likewise, Ukraine's state film agency appealed to TIFF to drop the film, which it said was "a dangerous tool for public opinion manipulation."

Trofimova has rejected criticisms of her documentary, telling AFP that it was "an anti-war film" showing "ordinary guys" who were fighting on the side of Russia.

Producer Sean Farnel said on X that the decision to cancel the screenings was "heartbreaking."

He blamed officials' public criticisms for having "incited the violent hate that has led to TIFF's painful decision to pause its presentation of 'Russians at War.'"

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