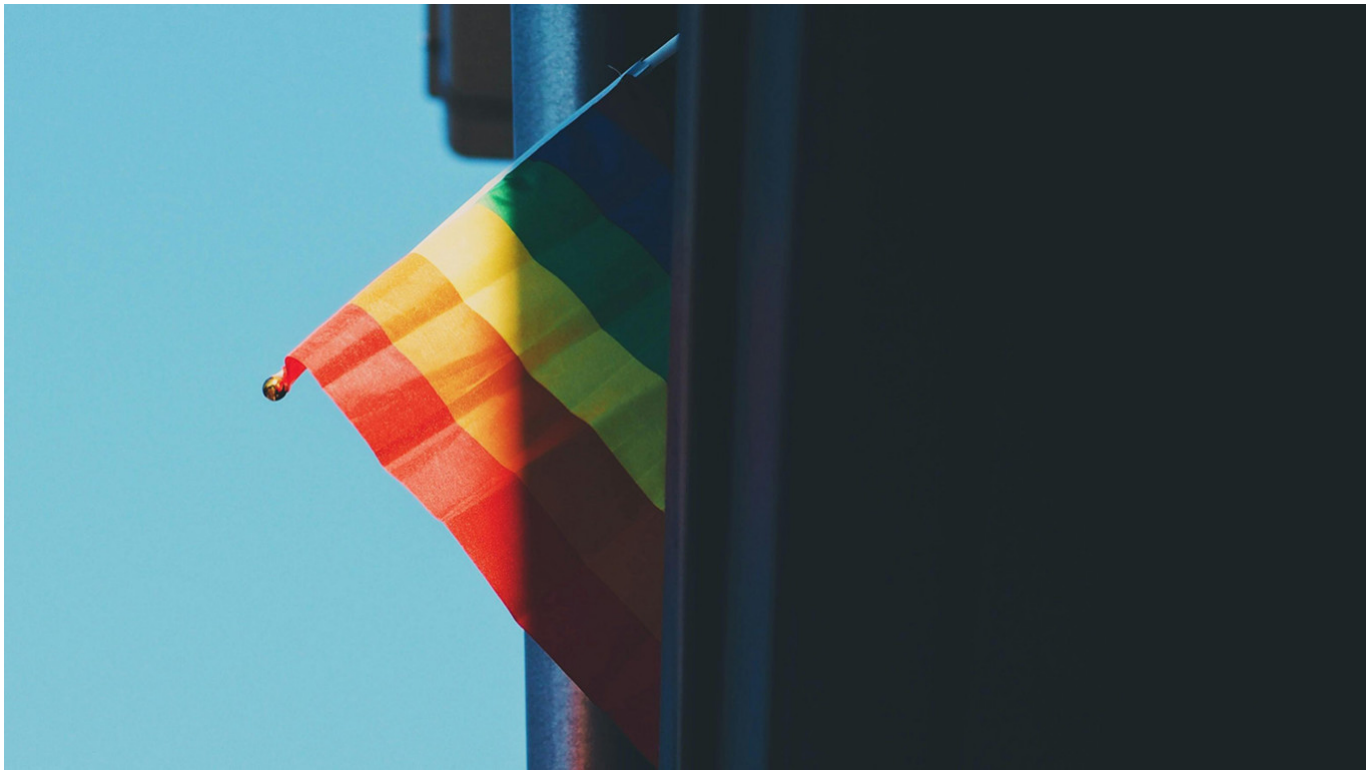
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Russian Court Outlaws Top LGBTQ+ Rights Group as 'Extremist'

By AFP

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Martina Martinez / pexels

A Russian court on Monday labeled the country's top LGBTQ+ rights group as "extremist," a move that outlaws the organization and paves the way to prosecute its supporters.

Russia has for years targeted LGBTQ+ organizations but has become even more hostile since launching its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, massively accelerating the country's hardline conservative turn.

On Monday, a court in St. Petersburg ruled in favor of a case brought by the Russian Justice Ministry to brand the Russian LGBT Network — a top LGBTQ+ rights nonprofit — "extremist."

"The public movement has been designated as an extremist organization, and its activities are banned in Russia," the court's press service said on Telegram.

The hearing was held behind closed doors.

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The designation could mean anybody associated with the group risks years behind bars for supporting an extremist organization — akin to terrorism charges under Russia's Criminal Code.

Amnesty International in February slammed the Justice Ministry's move to seek the label.

"This move reflects a deliberate strategy by the Kremlin to legitimize and weaponize homophobia in its assault on dissent and equality," said Marie Struthers, Amnesty International's Eastern Europe and Central Asia Director.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has for years denounced anything that goes against what he calls "traditional family values" as un-Russian and influenced by the West.

In 2023, Russia's Supreme Court banned what it called the "international social LGBT movement" as an "extremist organization."

As part of the crackdown, Russia has in recent years targeted LGBTQ+ clubs and bars, raiding them and arresting owners.

Courts have also issued fines and short-term jail sentences to people displaying LGBTQ+ "symbols," such as clothes, jewelry or posters featuring the rainbow flag.

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