

Feb. 7, the day of the opening ceremony for the Winter Olympics, four Russian LGBT activists were arrested in St. Petersburg, Russia for holding a banner citing the sixth principle of the Olympic Charter which states, “Discrimination is incompatible with the Olympic Movement.” Anastasia Smirnova was one of the four activists arrested that day. In a Facebook post, Smirnova thanked to her supporters and expressed disbelief in her arrest.

“Privet friends, thank you, thank you, thank you for your support and for being on the watchout for us! Can’t write much as phones are not permitted, and they are now calling us to sign papers. Cosmic hugs to you from our police station! PS. Detention for a photo with a banner - isn’t it an amazing way to celebrate the Opening of the Games? #CheersToSochi.”

The controversy over LGBT rights came from a Russian law banning gay propaganda to minors. In June 2013, Russia’s lower house of Parliament voted 436-0 to enforce fines and provide prison terms for the spread of “propaganda of nontraditional sexual relations.” President Vladimir Putin of Russia signed the bill into law that year. The fines, found in Article 6.21 of the Code of Administrative Offences of the Russian Federation, state Russian citizens can be charged for “propaganda of nontraditional sexual relations among minors expressed in distribution of information...” with a fine up to 50,000 rubles (\$1,300). For foreigners, the fines are as high as 5,000 rubles (\$130) and an arrest term of fifteen days with “administrative deportation” from the country. The fines and terms vary depending on the medium used to distribute the propaganda.

During a question-and-answer session of the Sochi Games, Putin told Olympic volunteers that gay visitors were welcomed in Russia despite the law. “We have no ban on nontraditional sexual relations. We have a ban on propaganda of homosexuality and pedophilia. I want to underline that, on propaganda among minors,” he said in a report by the Associated Press. Putin said criminalized homosexuality was worse in other countries because the punishment would be death.

Professor David M. Crane teaches international criminal and humanitarian law at Syracuse University College of Law. The former chief prosecutor of the Special Court for Sierra Leone said under the principle of state sovereignty, nations have the right to pass laws by which they govern their societies.

GOLD SILVER BRONZE OR EQUALITY?

WORDS BY JORDAN KINSEY
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ONE OF THE LARGEST INTERNATIONAL SPORTING EVENTS TO OCCUR EVERY FOUR YEARS WAS HELD IN A RESORT CITY LOCATED OFF THE SHORES OF THE BLACK SEA NEAR THE CAUCASUS MOUNTAINS. THE INTERNATIONAL OLYMPIC COMMITTEE (I.O.C.) SELECTED SOCHI, RUSSIA TO HOST THE 2014 WINTER OLYMPIC GAMES. NOT ONLY PLACING RUSSIA ON THE WORLD STAGE, BUT ALSO, BRINGING THE SPOTLIGHT TO A MAJOR CONCERN: LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL AND TRANSSEXUAL (LGBT) RIGHTS.

He added that some countries have passed laws that specifically target individuals who do not fit into society’s structures, but explained that certain human rights are still protected by international laws. “From a domestic point of view, [laws that target individuals or groups] may not be inherently illegal, but under international law, there are numerous [rules] and some ways customary international laws related to the race of human beings to enjoy life and the pursuit of happiness ... and other covenants which say that nations should agree not to discriminate against people based on their gender or their religious beliefs,” he said.

Putin defended the country’s controversial law by saying that it doesn’t discriminate against anyone, but aims to protect children in an interview with a small group of reporters, including ABC News anchor George Stephanopoulos.

“It seems to me that the law that we have adopted does not hurt anyone,” he said. “It has nothing to do with persecuting people for their nontraditional orientation. My personal position is that society must keep children safe.”

Violence against the LGBT community has even gone digital in Russia. Opposing groups of the LGBT community posted videos online of them harassing and attacking LGBT people and activists. The Human Rights Watch released a video on YouTube highlighting the malicious discrimination of LGBT members in Russia a few days before the Sochi Games started. The footage comes from a Russian Neo-Nazi group called “Occupy Pedophilia.”



Human Rights Watch YouTube video showing the attacks on the LGBT community.

The group is allegedly known for causing physical abuse and humiliation to gay people. In one scene of the video, an Uzbek migrant is abducted by a group of individuals and forced to apologize for his sexual orientation. “I’m sorry. I’m guilty,” he said as he sat firmly on his knees while being filmed.

“Do you agree that we should kill you?” one of the perpetrators asked. “I suppose that’s my fate,” the victim said hopelessly.

Later, the group burned his clothes, held him hostage with a gun, or what appeared to be a gun, to his head, forced him to say he regretted being gay, then handcuffed him and compelled him to rape himself with a glass bottle while he screamed in agony.

Susan Gage watched who watched these videos of LGBT members being terrorized. As a local LGBT rights activist and former president of Parents, Families, & Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) in Tallahassee, Fla., she found it to be reminiscent of the hate crimes against minority groups in the past. “It’s really disturbing because anytime you single out a group of people and label them as being akin to pedophiles or whatever then you start to dehumanize them. Those are all things we’ve seen in history already. We’ve seen what happened to Jews in Europe, we’ve seen what happened to African-Americans and this is just more of the same and it’s greatly disturbing,” she said.

U.S. Olympic Committee sponsor AT&T made a public statement condemning Russia’s anti-LGBT law.

The multinational telecommunications corporation discussed its stance in a blog post titled “A Time for Pride and Equality” after explaining its strong support for the Winter Olympics. “We support LGBT equality globally and we condemn violence, discrimination and harassment targeted against LGBT individuals everywhere. Russia’s law is harmful to LGBT individuals and families, and it’s harmful to a diverse society. We celebrate the diversity of all Olympic athletes, their fans, Russian residents and all people the world over – including and, especially, our employees and their loved ones.”

Even Google celebrated human rights in the Sochi Games by changing their logo on the opening day of the games. It displayed animated figures of athletes in various winter sporting events along with the letters of “Google” shadowed by colors of the rainbow, which is a symbol of the LGBT community. “Google has been known to be a big supporter of gay rights for some years now, their spontaneous display of support offered a rendering light for those who have been oppressed during the games and in general within the LGBTQ+ communities, whether it be in Russia, United States, Mexico, etc.,” said Ana Sanz, a junior fine arts student from Miami and the 2013-2014 secretary of Florida A&M University’s LGBT Student Pride Union. “Companies with the same measure, need to realize, that responsibilities like this are also in their hands, to bring the awareness of the unjust actions against these people and to further ignite the Gay Rights movement.”

“**WE’VE SEEN WHAT HAPPENED TO JEWS IN EUROPE, WE’VE SEEN WHAT HAPPENED TO AFRICAN-AMERICANS AND THIS IS JUST MORE OF THE SAME AND IT’S GREATLY DISTURBING.**”

The White House demonstrated its support for the diversity of all people in this year’s Olympics by selecting two openly gay former athletes to join the U.S. Olympic delegation at the opening and closing ceremonies in Sochi. The decision was made after a public campaign by gay rights group to urge the White House to include gays, lesbians and their supporters to bring attention to Russia’s national law.

The former athletes were tennis champion Billie Jean King and women’s ice hockey player Caitlin Cahow. Former figure skater Brian Boitano was another gay delegate selected, but publicly revealed his sexuality two days after the White House released the names of the delegates.

Later, King had to pull out of the opening ceremony due to family health reasons. “Sometimes it’s good to go to places where things aren’t good,” King said in an article by The Washington Post. “Sometimes you can help change by going to places where it’s difficult.”

Two months prior to the Winter Olympics, the I.O.C worked on a letter to send to the athletes reminding them not to participate in any demonstrations or political gestures while in Sochi, including protests against Russia’s “gay” propaganda law. The letter focused on Rule 50 in the Olympic Charter, which states, “No kind of demonstration or political, religious or racial propaganda is permitted in any Olympic sites, venues or other areas.”

According to the Pew Research Center, there were nearly 3,000 athletes from over 80 countries that competed. But, about seven openly gay athletes played in the Games and all were women. The athletes were Belle Brockhoff, Australian snowboarder; Ireen Wüst, Dutch speed skater; Daniela Iraschko-Stolz, Austrian ski jumper; Sanne van Kerkhof, Dutch short track speed skater; Cherly Maas, Dutch snowboarder; Barbara Jezeršek, Slovenia cross country skier; and Anatasia Bucsis, Canadian speed skater. Ireen Wüst was also the first gay athlete to win a medal in this year's Games.

"Sexual preference should not be singled out anymore than anybody else's preferences and how they choose to worship or how they chose to speak," Crane said. "The principles that are espoused under international law and the U.N. Charter really call for this kind of activities to not be condoned."

As a 26-foot robotic bear named Mishka blows out the Olympic flame, marking the end to the 22nd Olympic Winter Games, fireworks instantly explode over Olympic park during the closing ceremony.

Thousands of athletes parade the arena floor of Fisht Olympic Stadium to continue an Olympic ritual of harmony. For a split second all issues and problems are temporarily removed from the millions of viewers tuned in. For many human rights group, the struggles faced by the LGBT community have not ended, but continues to be confronted with persecution



COUNTRIES THAT SET FINES OR PRISON SENTENCES FOR COMMITTING HOMOSEXUAL ACTS:

1. ALGERIA
2. BANGLADESH
3. CAMEROON
4. DOMINICA
5. MALAYSIA
6. PAKISTAN
7. PAPUA NEW GUINEA
8. QATAR
9. UGANDA
10. ZIMBABWE

Dr. Renee Richards was the first transgender tennis player to compete in the U.S. Open. Before her sex change, his name was Richard Raskind and he was just an ophthalmologist, father and avid tennis player. During the '60s, Richards practiced wearing women's clothing until he finally made the decision to have gender reassignment surgery.

In her new life, she continued playing tennis before finally advancing to the 1977 U.S. Open. She was originally barred from competing in the Open because she declined to take a chromosome test to determine her eligibility to play in the competition.

She challenged the UTSA and the New York State Supreme Court justice ruled in her favor — allowing her to compete in the match. This decision is considered a landmark for transgender rights. In 2013 Richards was one of the first class of inductees in the National Gay and Lesbian Sports Hall of Fame.