

For immediate release

ON EVE OF SOCHI OLYMPICS, GROUPS RALLY FOR GLOBAL LGBT RIGHTS, IN RUSSIA AND BEYOND

TORONTO, February 6, 2014 — As part of a global wave of protests and actions timed with the opening of the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi, Russia, a coalition of human rights groups is rallying today outside the Russian Consulate in Toronto. The rally—along with a postcard and petition campaign targeting President Vladimir Putin and the Russian ambassador to Canada—will condemn the Russian government’s legislative assault on the rights of LGBT people, but it will also highlight the ongoing abuses in other parts of the world, such as Nigeria.

“The Russian government needs to hear from people in Canada, and around the world, that its so-called ‘gay propaganda’ law is an outright assault on freedom and equality,” says Richard Elliott, executive director of the Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network, one of the organizers. “Whether in person at the rally, or online through our petition, we invite everyone who cares about human rights to call out Russia on its global shame.”

Among the speakers at the rally will be Nadine Tkatchevskaia, an activist with the group #TOwithRussia, another of the organizers. “When it comes to human rights, Russia has become a rogue state,” says Tkatchevskaia. “Russian LGBT people cannot conduct their daily lives without fear of criminalization or physical violence. Instead of cheering the Olympics blindly, the world needs to sit up and pay attention: What group will President Putin target next?”

Russia is in the spotlight because of the Olympics, but sadly it is not alone among countries that are using the law to persecute LGBT people. Other speakers at the rally will highlight the struggles by LGBT people for basic human rights in countries such as Uganda, Jamaica, India, and most recently, Nigeria. A bill passed there last month further criminalizes LGBT people, even outlawing any LGBT organization and any support of such organizations, as well as any public display of a relationship between two people of the same sex, with up to 10 years in prison. Already, the homophobia has escalated into a full-scale witch-hunt, with public floggings and mob violence.

“The Nigerian government claims that this new law won’t affect the delivery of HIV prevention and care services, but they are not only fooling themselves, but all Nigerians,” says Adedapo Fabunmi, a Nigerian human rights activist based in Toronto

and working at Africans in Partnership Against AIDS (APAA) as a peer outreach worker with gay men and other men who have sex with men. “Just as in Russia, which today has the fastest-growing HIV epidemic in the world, attacking human rights has direct and devastating consequences for public health.”

For more information on the rally and march:

<https://www.facebook.com/events/1455549741335356/>

Event organizers: Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network, #TOWithRussia, Egale, AIDS ACTION NOW!, Pride Toronto, ARC International, and WorldPride Human Rights Conference 2014

To fill out the online petition: www.aidslaw.ca/russiapetition

A pre-rally event, “Run to Protest Putin — 1936: Never Again” at Queen’s Park, will recall the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin — when Olympic organizers also turned a blind eye to a host country’s growing despotism. For more information:

<https://www.facebook.com/runtoprotestputin>.

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Contact:

Kiran Mehde

Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network

comms@aidslaw.ca

+1 416 595-1666 ext. 236