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President Vladimir V. Putin

Dear President Putin,

Please accept my greetings on behalf of Human Rights Watch.

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RIGHTS
WATCH

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Your September 3 comments on Channel 1 television made clear that you are open to discussion about LGBT issues, so I am writing to urge you to initiate the repeal of law 135-FZ, which profoundly affects Russia's LGBT people.

As you know, 135-FZ introduces amendments to the Law on Protecting Children from Information Harmful to their Health and Development. It bans disseminating among minors information promoting the "attractiveness of nontraditional sexual relationships" and providing a "distorted notion of social equivalence of traditional and nontraditional sexual relationships." The ban would apply to the press, television, radio, and the Internet.

Although 135-FZ does not define "nontraditional," it is widely understood to mean lesbian, gay, and bisexual relationships.

Public debates in the lead-up and aftermath of the law's adoption have occasioned some instances of hateful, discriminatory, degrading rhetoric about LGBT people in Russia, including on state television stations. Several lawmakers have recently introduced a bill to deny parental rights to one or both parents of "nontraditional sexual orientation."

The law's supporters have argued that this law is intended to protect children, but, in fact, it has the potential to harm them. It sends an unambiguous message that it is wrong to be gay and that it is wrong and harmful to tell children that it is all right to be gay. It also sends an unambiguous message to Russian society that LGBT people are unnatural and alien to Russian society. This is degrading to Russia's LGBT people, and if anything is harmful to children – particularly older children, for example in the 13 to 17-year-old age range – who themselves might be LGBT.

Because the law degrades LGBT people, it is discriminatory. Russia has a special duty as host of the 2014 Winter Games to uphold the Olympic Charter, which explicitly rejects discrimination of any kind. Vice Premier Dmitri Kozak has given assurances to the International Olympic Committee that there will be no discrimination during the Games based on sexual orientation, and at the same time he has said that the "propaganda" law will be enforced. These assurances do not satisfy the requirements of the Olympic Charter to reject discrimination.

Moreover, the law clearly violates a large number of Russia's obligations

under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). The law violates the right to freedom of expression, the right to respect for the personal, private, and family lives of individuals, the right to equality, and the ban on discrimination in the enjoyment of those rights. As such, it violates articles 2, 17, 19, and 26 of the ICCPR and articles 8, 10, and 14 of the ECHR.

This is why we are asking you to use your constitutional authority to initiate legislation to immediately introduce a bill to repeal 135-FZ. This is why we are asking you to use your leadership to help reverse the tide of hateful, anti-LGBT rhetoric and to speak out against and veto any further legislation that discriminates against LGBT people, including the bill proposed this week. It is why you need to show through your actions and your words that Russia's LGBT people have the same dignity and rights as all Russians, and that the law will respect and protect their rights.

Sincerely,



Rachel Denber
Deputy Director
Europe and Central Asia Division
Human Rights Watch