

Russian Government May Shutter Outreach-Minded Church During Sochi Olympics

Since the beginning of the Winter Olympics in Russia, a church in Sochi is facing difficulties ahead. While the hospitality center (or Fun Zone) has attracted community members, national and international visitors, and even political leaders, a church was recently notified that the government of Sochi may want the church to move.

Director of Russia Inland Mission and a member of the Protestant Churches of Russia Vladimir Samoylov told us in an interview, "The government of Sochi gave this church the building and property of the church. But now there [are] some court paper issues, and they want the property [returned] back to the government. They want to sell it."

If this happens, Samoylov says the church will lose the property. They haven't posted a deadline, but "they are collecting all the necessary documents to go to the appeal court to prove that they have all the credits to own the property and the building."

If they lose, they would lose everything they have. This isn't the first time this has happened. Samoylov says, "We had the same situation in other regions of Russia. For example, in Moscow, a church was destroyed without any reasons to do it." The church didn't get any compensation for it.

Samoylov says the fear is that once that happens, the government will go after their official registration. Right now, that hasn't happened yet.

President of SOAR International Ministries, Richard Page, says he's concerned.

"If we're talking just about the building, it has it's obvious problems," Page says. "The church ministry will obviously continue. We'd want to help them re-establish themselves."

Page believes it'll take a while to figure it all out. But he's concerned about another issue.

"If they start to attack the registration of the church, then it's going to be a whole different issue," he says.

Did the Fun Zone cause this problem? Nobody knows. But there is good news.

"This ministry is obviously making a difference," Page says. "I think maybe the church will have more community support now," which could make the government's decision more difficult.

The main thing we can do is pray for this church. God has a plan for why this is happening. Pray that the government will reconsider its decision to close the building. Pray that the government will refrain from going after the registration and that God will use this to grow His church.

SOAR International continues assisting at the Fun Zone by providing funding and organization. You can help financially. As many as 300 people a day are attending the Fun Zone. Click the link to help.

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