

March 3, 2022

STATEMENT IN RELATION TO KAZAN WORLD WINTER GAMES

With sadness, disappointment, and deep frustration, Special Olympics International announces today that we will not be holding our World Winter Games in Kazan, Russia, which had been scheduled to begin on 21 January 2023.

For more than a half century, Special Olympics athletes, volunteers, families, and colleagues have been a nonpolitical, non-partisan force for the dignity, joy, and inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities around the world. In that spirit, our movement has been brought to life in communities in more than 190 countries. Our philosophy has been simple: we want to work with countries, cities, villages, communities, schools, and clubs around the world that want to join our movement to improve respect, opportunity, and voice for people with intellectual disabilities and their friends and families. Our only limitation is our capacity to protect the effectiveness and independence of our organization and the safety of our athletes and community.

We can no longer ensure the effectiveness of the World Winter Games in Kazan or the safety of our athletes and community. The horrific violence in Ukraine, the extensive sanctions implemented by the international community, and the uncertainty and fear being experienced around the world make it impossible to proceed. We are devastated by the fear and destruction being experienced by our athletes and community in Ukraine. Persons with an intellectual disability are suffering disproportionately, unfairly, and tragically in this war, as they have during the pandemic. We join our voices to millions around the world demanding peace and an end to violence immediately.

This cancellation is devastating to us, to our athletes in Ukraine, to our athletes in Russia, and to our athletes around the world who have trained for years to compete. We are grateful to people of good will within Russia and around the world who worked for years to make these games a success and while the games will not take place, we commit ourselves to continue working with the Special Olympics Program there now and in the future.

We remain resolute in our commitment to our athletes irrespective of political, national or other boundaries. We are a community of people who are unwilling to stop at anything to create a worldwide movement of inclusion with our athletes leading by word, by vision, and by example. We will stay focused on that mission in new and even more powerful ways in the days, months, and years ahead.

Special Olympics

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