November 8, 2018

Dear ICM Organizing Committee,

As President of the Association for Women in Mathematics, I would like to express deep concern and displeasure at the selection of St. Petersburg as the location for the 2022 International Congress of Mathematicians, specifically with regard to Russia’s openly aggressive laws towards the LGBTQ community.

Russia has a long, distinguished history of mathematics and we applaud Russian mathematicians’ contributions to the existing mathematical canon. There is no doubt that the work at the Imperial Russian Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg laid much of the groundwork for today’s mathematicians. We celebrate along with those mathematicians with Russian roots as they bring this important meeting to their home country. Although the choice for Russia to host the ICM may seem a natural one at first glance, we believe the ICM’s decision of St. Petersburg as the host city overlooks the safety concerns for ICM attendees, especially those from the LGBTQ+ community.

In 2012 St. Petersburg adopted anti-gay legislation in the form of a ban of ‘homosexual propaganda’. This law was adopted nationwide in 2013, a law which de facto criminalizes LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning) culture. George Poltavchenko, a co-chair of the Executive Organizing Committee of the 2022 ICM, was the governor of St. Petersburg who signed the law into effect in March, 2012. This law has led to the arrests of numerous Russian LGBTQ citizens who publicly opposed the law, and since its adoption by Russia there has been a surge in violence and hate crimes, according to the United Nations Human Rights Watch. By signing this legislation, Mr. Poltavchenko communicated that members of the LGBTQ community are not welcome within one of the largest and most metropolitan cities in the Russian Federation. The enforcement of such policies, and the anti-gay sentiment of the greater Russian government indicates that mathematicians from such communities are not welcome in St. Petersburg, and therefore not welcome at ICM2022. The choice of St. Petersburg, as the host city of one of the largest mathematics gatherings, jeopardizes the safety of members of our community.

The safety and inclusion of every mathematician wishing to attend the ICM should be given serious consideration when determining the venue for such an important gathering. The frontier of mathematics is pushed forward by our community as a whole, with every member participating and contributing. When members of the community are expected to attend an event where their sexual orientation or gender presentation puts their personal safety at risk, then the success of mathematics as a whole is put into jeopardy. The AWM supports all members in their endeavors and, as such, we encourage our membership to consider their safety when choosing whether or not to attend a conference.

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In an effort to make ICM2022 open and inclusive to all mathematicians, we encourage you, the organizing committee, to have an open discussion about the safety of all participants at the conference. We strongly encourage you to reconsider your choice of St. Petersburg as the host site for 2022. If you are unable to change the location, we urge you to publish information specifically addressing the particular dangers that LGBTQ mathematicians who wish to attend the meeting will face. We expect ICM organizing committees to approach site selection with intentionality towards fostering a more diverse and welcoming community.

Sincerely,

Ami Radunskaya
President
Association for Women in Mathematics