

## Australian diplomats to boycott Paralympics Opening Ceremony

[Rob Harris](#), SMH/The Age, March 6, 2026 — 8:50pm

Australia will join a growing diplomatic boycott of the opening ceremony of the Winter Paralympics at Milan-Cortina on Friday night, refusing to send government representatives in protest at the inclusion of Russian and Belarusian athletes.

Government sources confirmed Australia would not dispatch officials to the ceremony and would [align with like-minded nations including Britain and Canada](#), as tensions flare over Russia's return to the global sporting stage. The government is yet to issue an official statement.

Athletes, however, have been left to make their own decision about whether to attend the ceremony, which marks [the return of Russian and Belarusian flags](#) on the sporting stage for the first time since the invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

Six athletes from Russia and four athletes from Belarus have been allowed to compete in the Games by the International Paralympic Committee. It will be the first time athletes have competed under the Russian flag at the Paralympics since the 2014 Games in Sochi.

The move comes as Ukrainian community leaders in Australia ramp up pressure on sporting authorities to take a harder stance. **The Australian Federation of Ukrainian Organisations** issued a plea this week urging supporters to petition Paralympics Australia to boycott the opening ceremony and publicly oppose the inclusion of the two nations.

A spokesperson for Paralympics Australia confirmed the national team would still take part in the ceremony and the traditional parade of nations, although not all athletes will attend.

"Australia will be represented at the opening ceremony, but our team will have a reduced presence in attendance due to performance reasons," the spokesperson said.

Some athletes will skip the ceremony because they are scheduled to compete the following day.

Several European countries and the British government have also announced they will boycott the opening ceremony in protest. The International Paralympic Committee said the Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Ukraine would not be sending athletes or officials to the ceremony on Friday night.

The International Paralympic Committee estimates fewer than 60 per cent of competing countries will send a full delegation to the ceremony at the Arena di Verona.

IPC president Andrew Parsons this week defended the decision to allow Russian athletes to compete under their own flag for the first time since 2014, after Russia and Belarus were banned from the 2022 Paralympics following the invasion of Ukraine.

“Our clear focus remains on supporting all stakeholders arriving and preparing to deliver the best Paralympic Winter Games,” Parsons said.

“We are collaborating with Milano Cortina and ensuring this event continues to serve as a platform to drive social change for the world’s 1.3 billion persons with disability.”

Parsons said the decision by the IPC general assembly last September reflected votes by member organisations.

“I acknowledge this decision has not been well received in some parts of the world,” he said.

“But I want to stress that the IPC is a democratic global organisation whose decisions on member suspension are determined by its members.”

Should a Russian Paralympic athlete win gold, it would mark the first time the Russian anthem has been played at a major global sporting event in four years.

The diplomatic protest echoes previous disputes over the use of sporting boycotts as a tool of foreign policy. China accused Australia of “political posturing” when Canberra joined the United States and New Zealand in a diplomatic boycott of the Beijing Winter Olympics, declining to send officials or diplomats in protest at the communist government’s human rights record.

Australia notably did not join the mass Western boycott of the 1980 Moscow Olympic Games, a decision that at the time sparked intense debate over the role of sport in geopolitical conflict.