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AUSTRALIA: TASMANIAN GOVERNMENT SHOULD REPEAL DISCRIMINATORY LAWS
AGAINST HOMOSEXUALS

Amnesty International today called on the Tasmanian Government to withdraw its plans to increase the maximum penalty for private homosexual acts between consenting males.

On 24 January, State Premier Ray Groom announced the State Government's plans to increase the maximum penalty from 21 to 25 years imprisonment.

"It is outrageous that anyone should face 25 years in prison merely for exercising their sexual orientation," Amnesty International said. "Nobody should spend any time in a prison solely as a result of their sexual orientation. We would consider anyone jailed under this legislation as a prisoner of conscience."

In a letter today to State Premier Groom, Amnesty International called on the Tasmanian Government to repeal all legislation under which consenting male adults can be jailed for homosexual activity in private. This is the third appeal made by the organization: previous appeals were made in 1992 and 1993.

The Human Rights Committee ruled on 31 March 1994 that sections 122(a) and (c) and 123 of the Tasmanian Criminal Code were in direct breach of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Following this decision, the Australian Federal Government passed the Human Rights (Sexual Conduct) Act 1994, which enshrines the right to sexual privacy. However, the Tasmanian Attorney-General was reported in February 1995 to have said that the Act was "[...] political window dressing. It doesn't make our law invalid and it doesn't affect the way it has applied for decades."

"Concerns for public morals are no defence against charges of human rights abuses," Amnesty International said. "The Tasmanian Government should fulfill its obligations under international law to uphold human rights by accepting the decision of the Human Rights Committee."

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