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Puerto Rico must seize historic chance to end discrimination

Puerto Rico's lawmakers have a historic opportunity to end discrimination against the island's Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex (LGBTI) people with a pair of bills due for debate this week, Amnesty International said today.

"The approval of these two laws would be a big step for justice and equality for an important sector of Puerto Rico's population, which to date has fallen victim to institutionalized discrimination," said Pedro Santiago, director of Amnesty International Puerto Rico.

In January 2013, Puerto Rico's House of Representatives and Senate agreed to discuss the two bills aimed at better protection of LGBTI rights.

Senate Bill 238 would ban discrimination based on real or perceived sexual orientation and gender identity in employment as well as in public and private services.

Its partner legislation, House of Representatives Bill 488, seeks to extend existing domestic violence protections to any person regardless of their marital status, sexual orientation or gender identity.

Lawmakers are due to take up debate on both bills this week.

"These two measures would expand the protection of rights for LGBTI people in Puerto Rico. Our legislators should be brave enough to overcome prejudice when making new laws. Human rights are not a matter of choice but of justice, and all people are entitled to enjoy them regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity," said Santiago.