

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL FEATURE

AI index: ACT 30/032/2013
17 May 2013

Activists worldwide target homophobia in Jamaica, Ukraine and South Africa

In Jamaica, some men are labelled as criminals just for expressing their love.

Attempts to hold a Pride in the Ukrainian capital Kyiv have repeatedly run into roadblocks because of very real threats of violence and a police force unwilling to protect participants.

And in South Africa, homophobic hatred all too often leads to violent attacks and killings which frequently go uninvestigated by police.

These three countries provide just a snapshot of the types of discrimination and violence faced by lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) people the world over. In many countries, such a climate of prejudice increases the likelihood of physical attacks and other human rights abuses against people because of their real or perceived sexual orientation and gender identity.

On 17 May, to mark the [International Day against Homophobia and Transphobia \(IDAHO\)](#), Amnesty International supporters worldwide will take action to highlight the human rights situation of LGBTI people in these three countries and show solidarity.

High levels of discrimination

Around the world, individuals face numerous human rights violations because of their real or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity.

LGBTI people face disproportionately high levels of discrimination when accessing healthcare, education, employment and housing. In many countries, consensual same-sex conduct remains criminalized and LGBTI people are often subjected to violence, harassment, arbitrary arrests, unlawful detention, imprisonment, and torture. Several countries still impose the death penalty for same-sex consensual relations, and it is at risk of being introduced in some others.

They are also denied the right to freedom of expression and assembly – in some countries, activists organizing Pride events face bans by city authorities or inadequate police protection when the Prides are threatened with violence.

IDAHO was created in 2004 to draw the attention of policymakers, opinion leaders, social movements, the public and the media to such issues. It takes place on 17 May each year to commemorate the World Health Organization's decision in 1990 to declassify "homosexuality" as a mental disorder.

"Simply because of who they are, LGBTI people in many countries face discrimination, violence and fear as a part of their daily lives," said Emily Gray of the Gender, Sexuality and Identity Programme at Amnesty International.

"On the International Day against Homophobia and Transphobia, Amnesty International is calling on thousands of activists to make a strong show of solidarity to help change attitudes and realities in Jamaica, Ukraine and South Africa."

Activists respond

In **Jamaica**, consensual same-sex conduct between men continues to be criminalized and punishable by up to 10 years behind bars. While these laws are rarely implemented, the resulting climate of prejudice increases the likelihood of discrimination, physical attacks and other human rights abuses against people because of their real or perceived sexual orientation and gender identity.

Such discrimination translates into frequent incidents of arbitrary arrests, detention and ill-treatment of LGBTI people. Access to healthcare, housing, employment and other services is also limited by disproportionately high levels of discrimination.

During December 2011 electoral campaign, the current Prime Minister, Portia Simpson-Miller, stated that "no one should be discriminated against because of their sexual orientation", and that the "government should provide protection" for LGBTI people.

Amnesty International activists are [using Twitter](#) to remind the Prime Minister and her government of the urgency to take concrete action to back up this pledge.

Meanwhile in Europe, LGBTI people in **Ukraine** [face negative stereotyping and discriminatory treatment by members of the public and officials](#). Religious leaders and elected government officials have been known openly to make discriminatory comments about LGBTI people.

No Pride march has ever taken place in Ukraine. A march planned in the capital Kyiv last May was cancelled because of threats of violence against participants from members of the public, and a police failure to put adequate security measures in place.

Other public events by LGBTI groups have been banned for fear of eliciting negative reactions from the public, and LGBTI activists have been prosecuted for exercising their right to freedom of peaceful assembly.

There are fears that a Pride planned for 25 May this year may once again be cancelled because of threats and inadequate protection measures from the police.

Amnesty International fully supports Kyiv Pride. It has been working with the organizers to ensure local authorities allow it to go ahead without hindrance, and will send a delegation to support the march.

Activists are also focusing on **South Africa**, where hate crimes targeting individuals because of their real or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity are all too common.

Between June and November 2012 alone, Amnesty International documented seven murders of LGBTI people in the country – though the actual number is likely to be much higher.

There is an apparent disconnect between South Africa's progressive laws on LGBTI issues, and practical access to justice for LGBTI individuals who are victims of hate crimes. This is evident in the failure of the police to investigate adequately cases of violence against LGBTI people and the continuing climate of fear they endure, especially in townships and rural areas. On the whole, impunity for such hate crimes pervades.

On and around this 17 May, Amnesty International supporters will send personal messages of solidarity to LGBTI activists in South Africa, to stand together against hate crimes.

“Amnesty International believes that all people, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity, should be able to exercise their full human rights without fear of violence, discrimination and persecution,” said Emily Gray.