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Rome 2 July 2000 -- Amnesty International demands equal rights and dignity for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered people

Lesbians, gay, bisexual and transgendered people around the world are still often not recognized as "equal in dignity and rights" and continue facing repression and harassment, Amnesty International said today. The organization's Italian Section and LGBT Network are organizing an "International LGBT Human Rights Rally and Press Conference" to be held in Rome on 2 July on the human rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered people.

In countries as diverse as Argentina and Malaysia, Brazil and Romania, Austria and Venezuela, Australia and Saudi Arabia, the United Kingdom and Zimbabwe, and many more, people are persecuted, discriminated against, arrested, tortured and even killed for their sexual orientation.

"The rights to freely determine one's sexual orientation -- a fundamental aspect of the human personality -- and to express it without fear are human rights in the fullest sense," Amnesty International said.

"The struggle of gay people for equality is a struggle for human rights, and as such it must be supported at any time," the organization added.

The Rome event will comprise:

- International press conference, 2 July, 11 a.m., Campidoglio (Mayor's office) -- speakers include: Marco de Ponte, Vice president Amnesty International Italy; Katia Bellillo, Italian Minister of Equal*

Opportunities; Patricia Lambert, Special Delegate from the Minister of Health of South Africa; Ms Lousewies van der Laan, Member of European Parliament.

- **International LGBT Human Rights Rally**, 2 July, 18.30, Circo Massimo -- Joint welcome by Amnesty International Italy and World Pride 2000; speeches by the above speakers

As World Pride 2000 takes place in Europe, Amnesty International draws special attention to LGBT human rights in Europe, where the organization's main human LGBT concerns lie with Eastern Europe, Romania, Cyprus, and Austria. During the whole World Pride week, a special petition signing action on the age of consent in Austria will be held in the World Pride Village and the streets of Rome.

Background

Article 209 of the Austrian penal code violates the Austrian Government's obligations under international law to guarantee equal treatment and non-discrimination for all individuals in the enjoyment of human rights. Article 209 states: 'A man over 19 years of age who engages in same-sex lewdness with a person who has attained the age of 14 but not yet the age of 18 shall be punished with imprisonment from six months to five years'. Sexual relations between men are not punishable if both partners are between the ages of 14 and 19. However, the organization is concerned that gay men over the age of 19 engaged in consensual sexual relations with other males under the age of 18 face imprisonment. Similar punishments do not exist for identical lesbian or heterosexual contacts. All petition lists will be offered to the Austrian Government after July 15, 2000.

Pride events in Europe, the United States and Australia, as well as in South Africa, have become the celebration of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender culture in the nineties, often assembling hundreds of thousands of visitors. 'Stonewall riots' in New York on 27 June 1969, sparked off a second world-wide lgbt liberation movement. Pride events are traditionally also an important forum to focus on LGBT human rights. World Pride 2000, being the largest Pride event in the year 2000, offers the right forum for LGBT human rights defenders from South America, Africa and Europe in the spotlight.

Amnesty International's "International Lesbian Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Network" presently comprises approximately 27 national Amnesty Sections and structures in the same number of countries around the world. The number of international LGBT human rights actions initiated by the organization is rapidly increasing and LGBT human rights concerns form an integral part of Amnesty International's general human rights work since 1991.

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