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Moscow authorities ban gay pride event

Amnesty International is calling on the Moscow authorities to overturn their ban on the city's gay pride event, which had been set to take place on 28 May.

Moscow's Deputy Mayor told the event organiser, Nikolai Alekseyev, and confirmed to Amnesty International, that his application to hold the event had been rejected due to the large number of objections it had received from members of the public.

"The Moscow City Authorities must overturn their decision to ban this year's Moscow Gay Pride. So-called public morality concerns can never be used to justify restrictions on the freedom of expression of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people," said Nicola Duckworth, Director of Amnesty International's Europe and Central Asia Programme.

"The right response to such objections is not to cave in to their demands, but to ensure that those seeking to exercise their rights lawfully are able to do so in safety and in dignity."

For the last six years, gay rights activists in Moscow have been denied permission to organize a pride event. Events that have taken place have been violently dispersed by law enforcement officials.

In October 2010, the European Court of Human Rights ruled that Russia had violated the right to freedom of assembly of activists seeking to hold pride events in Moscow in recent years.

The court found that by "relying on such blatantly unlawful calls as grounds for the ban, the authorities effectively endorsed the intentions of persons and organisations that clearly and deliberately intended to disrupt a peaceful demonstration in breach of the law and public order."

Gay rights activists in St. Petersburg have recently enjoyed greater success in exercising their right to the freedom of expression.

In October last year, a St. Petersburg court ruled, for the first time, that the banning of the St. Petersburg Pride event was illegal.

Yesterday, an authorised gathering attended by more than 100 LGBT rights activists took place peacefully in the city.

Over the last year, however, activists across Russia have been assaulted for speaking out on the rights of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people.

"The Russian authorities must ensure that lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people in Russia are able to express the identities and organise public events without hindrance or the threat of violence," said Nicola Duckworth.

“The last few years have seen some signs of greater tolerance of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people in Russia, but they still face widespread discrimination. Moscow should be leading the fight for LGBT rights – not holding it back.”