

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

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Bulgaria: Authorities must protect lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex activists from threats of attacks against the Sofia Pride march

On 10 June, the 10th Sofia Pride march is taking place amid concerns that a counter-demonstration, organized at the same location and around the same time, could mar the event with violence.

Amnesty International is concerned by reports that a far-right group calling itself National Resistance (*Nacionalna Suprotiva*) has planned on 10 June a counter-demonstration to stop the Sofia Pride march from happening. From the social media pages of the event, it clearly emerges that the group has hostile intentions towards the Sofia Pride, as they state that the purpose of their demonstration is to stop the Pride march from taking place by “cleaning up the trash and sick individuals” organising the “tenth sodomy parade”. The counter-demonstration will have the same starting point as the Sofia Pride march, the Monument of the Soviet Army, and will start around the same time as the gathering for the march will begin.

In light of the apparent hostile and threatening attitude of the National Resistance’s counter-demonstration, Sofia Pride organizers have been advised by the Sofia municipality to change the starting point and route of the march. Organizers are reluctant to do so as they fear that this can have an impact on the attendance of the march, and have rather requested support from municipality to ensure that they can carry out the Pride march according to their plans. Despite their requests, the Sofia municipality has confirmed that both the march and the counter-demonstration will go ahead at the same location. Amnesty International has written to the Mayor of Sofia to urge her to support the right to peaceful assembly of the Pride organizers publicly and to prevent any hostility towards the event.

Despite reassurances by the police that they will guarantee their safety, the Sofia Pride organizers are still very concerned. In the past years, Bulgarian NGOs have reported cases of attacks immediately after the march by anti-LGBTI groups which were not prevented by the police.

Amnesty International is calling on Bulgarian authorities to publicly support the Sofia Pride, and make all necessary arrangements to ensure the safety of organizers and participants of the Sofia Pride march on 10 June, and of other events organized during the Pride.