

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

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POLAND: INADEQUATE POLICE PROTECTION FOR BIAŁYSTOK MARCH AMIDST ANTI-LGBTI HATE

Amnesty International is concerned that the authorities did not provide adequate protection for the participants of the “Equality March” in Białystok on 20 July.

The march took place amidst widespread anti-LGBTI rhetoric by politicians and some media outlets. According to the police estimates there were 1,000 participants and roughly 4,000 counter-protesters who threw fire crackers, cobblestones and eggs; and shouted insults and physically attacked some of the marchers. The police presence numbered about 700 officers but given the hostile environment, including acts of intimidation and violence, the police protection clearly was not adequate.

Amnesty International staff members and volunteers attended the march and planned to monitor the assembly, but they were not able to conduct monitoring along its route due to serious security concerns.

The counter-demonstrators attacked the participants verbally, threw stones, firecrackers and various items, including bags with garbage.

The counter-protesters assembled at the vicinity of the site where the Equality March was supposed to start. They shouted anti-LGBTI chants and attempted to block the march. The police cordoned off the area and did not let march participants into it for about half an hour.

Amnesty International’s staff observed that due to lack of safe access to the assembly point of the march, counter-protesters were able to confront some marchers and physically attacked them. The police failed to respond to these instances of violence, which included beatings, kicking, burning banners and throwing fire crackers at the march participants.

The counter-protesters attempted to block the march at least six times and the police did intervene to ensure that it could continue. The march was re-routed several times due to the disruptions caused by the counter-protesters. Although the march eventually reached its final point, participants faced verbal and physical attacks from the counter-protesters throughout the entire route.

States have an obligation to protect the safety of those involved in assemblies and to make sure police are trained appropriately, as well as an obligation to ensure that the presence of counter-demonstrators does not infringe on the right to assembly. Adequate assessment of risks before, during and after rallies is part of the authorities’ obligation to protect the right to freedom of assembly. The potential presence and activities of counter demonstrations must be part of such assessment.

Amnesty International has raised concerns in the past about hate crimes committed in [Białystok](#). The city houses a small community of ethnic and religious minorities who have been the target of such crimes.

Hate crimes – motivated by racism, anti-LGBTI attitudes or other forms of hatred – represent a particular affront to human dignity and need to be promptly, independently, impartially and thoroughly investigated – and those responsible must be brought to justice. Amnesty International urges the authorities in Poland to publicly condemn the attacks on the Białystok Equality March, to express their support to the LGBTI rights activists, to commence a full, effective and impartial investigation as a matter of urgency, and to ensure that the perpetrators are brought to justice.