



JOINT PUBLIC STATEMENT

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Turkey: Istanbul Pride march must go ahead unhindered

As the annual Istanbul Pride due to take place on Sunday 1 July approaches, Amnesty International, ILGA-Europe and All Out stand in solidarity with Turkey's LGBTI+ communities and their allies, calling on the authorities to ensure Istanbul Pride march takes place without any unlawful restrictions.

Fotis Filippou, Campaigns Director for Europe at Amnesty International said:

"In the current climate of fear, where authorities are clamping down on civil society, freedom of expression and diversity, it is all the more important for LGBTI individuals to be visible and freely celebrate pride. People around the world are standing in solidarity with Turkey's LGBTI activists and their allies, who, against all odds are marching for human rights and equality."

The last time it took place in 2014, an estimated 90,000 people participated in the vibrant Istanbul Pride parade in Istiklal Avenue, the city's main shopping street. This was the largest of the gatherings since 2003, when just 30 LGBTI+ activists had been present in the first ever Pride march. But all this changed when the Istanbul Governorate banned the 2015 Pride march in Istanbul, police violently dispersing participants with water cannons, tear gas and pepper ball projectiles, detaining dozens of people in the process. In 2016 and 2017, small groups of LGBTI+ activists and allies were also prevented from marching following bans by the Governorate.

Björn van Roozendaal, Programmes Director for ILGA-Europe said:

"In 2018, Pride is undoubtedly a litmus test for democratic values – a test that over the past few years, Turkey has failed to meet. It's particularly disappointing when you consider the incredible history of Pride in Istanbul. Sadly, the restrictions on LGBTI public events since then in the region are indicative of the attempted erosion of civil society organising and human rights. History is repeating itself."

And make no mistake, this is harming all of society, not just the LGBTI communities and their allies. Attacks on activism and dissenting voices, a constant refusal from authorities to engage with their citizens, and persistent disregard for fundamental rights - this is something that should provoke a reaction from all communities, not only the LGBTI movement."

Turkey's LGBTI+ communities are determined to exercise their right to peacefully celebrate pride. In fact, on 11 May, students at the Middle East Technical University in Ankara did just that, despite the ongoing city wide blanket ban on all LGBTI+ events. In Izmir, hundreds took part in the 6th annual Pride march on 10 June.

Matt Beard, Executive Director for All Out said:

"We will continue to stand in solidarity with LGBTI people in Istanbul and across Turkey. Authorities can ban peaceful gatherings, they can silence dissent, they can use hard, raw power to bully and coerce others. But they will never extinguish the hunger for freedom, respect, and dignity that are at the very heart of Pride."

Under domestic and international law, Turkish authorities are under obligation to protect the rights to freedom of peaceful expression and assembly. On 1 July, Istanbul Pride must be allowed to go ahead unhindered and be protected.

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