

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

Index: EUR 53/9060/2018

Date: 10 September 2018

LITHUANIAN AUTHORITIES MUST INVESTIGATE ATTACKS AGAINST LGBTI PEOPLE

Amnesty International is deeply concerned by the recent attacks against LGBTI people in Lithuania. In August, a series of arson attacks were directed at the premises of the Lithuanian Gay League (LGL) – the national LGBT rights organization - and the apartment of its Executive Director Vladimir Simonko in Vilnius. In September, the building where the openly gay film director Romas Zabarauskas lives, was targeted in two similar attacks. Amnesty International calls on the Lithuanian authorities to publicly condemn the attacks, and to thoroughly investigate the incidents.

On 10 August, the office of LGL and the apartment of Vladimir Simonko were targeted in an attack during which the exterior door and door blinds were set on fire at the premises of the office. Only weeks after, on the night from 1 to 2 September, the door of an apartment neighbouring with Romas Zabarauskas' flat was set on fire. Zabarauskas believes that he could have been targeted because he had put up a rainbow flag on his balcony to express his support and solidarity after the attacks against LGL and Simonko. Four days later, on 6 September, another attack took place as the door of an apartment a few floors above Zabarauskas's home was set alight.

Hate crimes 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. Chapter XXV of Lithuanian Criminal Code encompasses crimes of discrimination based on a number of characteristics, including sexual orientation, yet according to Lithuanian activists, in the instances involving LGL, Simonko and Zabarauskas, law enforcement officials initially refused to file the complaint as a potential hate crime based on sexual orientation or gender identity.

According to Zabarauskas, the law enforcement officers did not act

professionally on the night of the first attack. One of them reportedly suggested that he should 'take off the flag before the whole house has burnt'. Activists report that underreporting of such attacks continues to be high in the country as many fear that authorities will not respond appropriately to incidents against LGBTI people.

The attacks are symptomatic of a wider problem of prejudice against LGBTI communities in the country. Amnesty International urges the authorities to publicly condemn the attacks and to express their support to LGBTI communities while ensuring a thorough and impartial investigation that will specifically consider the alleged homophobic motive of the crimes.