

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

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## Turkey must protect, not ban Pride marches

Amnesty International is dismayed at the decision of the Ankara Governor to ban a march to celebrate the International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia (IDAHOT) planned to take place in Ankara on Sunday, 22 May. Amnesty International is calling on Turkish authorities to ensure that lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) individuals and their allies are able to enjoy their rights to freedom of expression and assembly without fear of intimidation or violence.

On Friday 20 May, the Governor's office informed the organisers in writing that "certain groups could react and there could be provocations directed at the participants of the march due to social sensibilities". The Governor's response to the LGBTI organization KAOS-GL, which had informed the authorities of the march, cited Article 17 of the Law of Meetings and Demonstrations which unfairly limits the right to freedom of assembly.

Amnesty International received information that KAOS-GL, the main organiser of the march appealed the Governor's decision in the Administrative Court in Ankara on 20 May and demanded protection from the authorities. The Ankara Administrative Court No. 15 ruled a stay of execution of the Governor's decision, lifting the ban on the march.

The same evening, the Ankara Governor's office appealed the Court's decision on grounds that the decision to grant a stay of execution on the Governor's ban was 'unlawful'. Committee No.1 of the Ankara Area Administrative Court upheld the Governor's appeal and, therefore, the ban on Ankara march to celebrate IDAHOT.

Amnesty International is dismayed at the authorities' persistence in preventing the march from going ahead. Amnesty International strongly believes that the use of 'social sensibilities and threats' is not a reasonable justification to ban the IDAHOT march. International law recognises the right to freedom of expression and assembly and the recognition of this right extends to speech and ideas that might offend. The ban imposed on the Ankara IDAHOT march is a disproportionate restriction of the right to freedom of peaceful assembly. LGBTI people should have the freedom to march and spread the message of equality, tolerance and non-discrimination without the fear of threats or abuse.

International law allows for restrictions on the exercise of freedom of expression that are proportionate for specific purposes including respect of the rights or reputations of others or to protect national security or public order. However Amnesty International believes that these restrictions did not apply in this case and that the Turkish authorities should not only have allowed the IDAHOT march to proceed as planned, but they should have also ensured that all necessary measures would have been in place to protect the participants.

The exercise of the right to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly has been routinely and arbitrarily prevented in Turkey, together with widespread unnecessary or excessive force by law enforcement officers against peaceful protestors. Last year, [the annual Istanbul Pride march was](#)

[prevented from taking place](#) by police who used water cannons and tear gas to disperse peaceful demonstrators. This year International Women's Day assembly in Istanbul on 6 March was also not allowed to go ahead by police who used tear gas and beat protestors.

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