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## **Russia urged to reconsider anti-gay laws as activist fined**

A prominent Russian LGBTI rights activist has become the first person to be fined for spreading “gay propaganda” under a new St Petersburg law after he picketed the city hall with a poster that said “homosexuality is not a perversion”.

Nikolai Alexeyev announced today the news of his conviction via Twitter: “Who can pay my fine for gay propaganda in St. Petersburg? 5000 rub, 130 euros, 180 usd”.

Alexeyev was convicted under an offence created only in March this year when St Petersburg, Russia’s second-largest city, followed the lead of regions such as Arkhangelsk and Riazan and introduced anti-“gay propaganda” legislation.

Amnesty International, which at the time urged St Petersburg not to enact such legislation, has condemned the conviction.

“Such laws threaten freedom of expression and fuel discrimination against the city’s lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) community,” said Europe and Central Asia Programme Director John Dalhuisen.

The new laws effectively ban LGBTI public events and demonstrations under the pretext of protecting minors. Even information leaflets on rights or assistance or advice available to such groups can be severely restricted.

There are concerns that the legislation violates the rights of freedom of expression and assembly as well as the right to non-discrimination and equality before the law, guaranteed by international human rights treaties to which Russia is a party.

“Furthermore, it contributes to a climate of hostility and violence towards LGBTI individuals,” said Dalhuisen.

Amnesty International is particularly concerned that plans for laws aimed at banning “propaganda of homosexuality” are underway in other regions including Samara and Novosibirsk.

A similar Bill was introduced to the Russian State Duma at the end of March.

Nikolai Alexeyev has said that he will appeal the decision. If a higher court in St Petersburg upholds the Friday decision he will go to Russia’s Constitutional Court and then to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg.

Moscow’s former mayor Yuri Luzhkov described gay parades as “satanic”; his successor Sergei Sobyenin has said he disapproves of gay gatherings because they can offend the religious beliefs of many Russians.

Further indications of a growing intolerance towards LGBTI demonstrations come in a report from Reuters that around 17 gay rights activists were arrested in St Petersburg by Russian police under the “homosexual propaganda” law after participating in a May Day celebration.