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Russia: Reject absurd bill that targets gay people

Russian politicians must reject a controversial new law that targets what it describes as the “propaganda of homosexuality among minors” when it comes before the country’s Parliament or “Duma” on 19 December, Amnesty International said.

In a letter to the State Duma, the organization is calling on parliamentarians to respect the country’s international obligations to protect the right to freedom of expression and assembly of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) people.

The law would make the "promotion of homosexuality among minors" an administrative offence in federal law, with fines of up to 500,000 roubles (US\$ 16,200).

But because there is no proper explanation for what constitutes “propaganda of homosexuality” it could thus be interpreted very loosely. Russian laws also do not define ‘homosexuality’.

“This law is an anachronism. It will promote stigmatization by perpetuating the view that children should be protected from homosexuality. It will discriminate against LGBTI people, in a country where discrimination on ground of sexual orientation and gender identity is already widespread,” said John Dalhuisen, Europe and Central Asia Programme Director at Amnesty International.

“This law will deny LGBTI people equality before the law by curtailing the activities of LGBTI human rights defenders, some of whom have already been harassed and assaulted. It will deprive LGBTI people of information that could be crucial for their sexual health.”

“This law perversely presumes that the moral, spiritual and psychological development of children is best served by denying them access to support and information that can help them make informed, autonomous and responsible decisions. The law is not just unjust, it is patently absurd.”

Similar laws have been approved in regions including Ryazan, Arkhangelsk Kostroma, St. Petersburg, Novosibirsk, Magadan, Samara, Bashkortostan and Krasnodar. Some of these laws also prohibit "propaganda of paedophilia among minors", thus linking the sexual abuse of children with consensual, private sexual activity between adults.

An action by an LGBTI activist brought to light the discriminatory character of one such piece of legislation – the Ryazan Region Law concerning “public actions aimed at the propaganda of homosexuality”.

Irina Fedotova turned to the UN Human Rights Committee after a court fined her 1,500 Roubles (US\$ 48) for “public actions aimed at the propaganda of homosexuality”. She had put up posters that read “Homosexuality is normal” and “I am proud of my homosexuality” near a school in Ryazan. In October 2012 the Committee found that Russia had violated Irina Fedotova’s right to freedom of expression and her right to non-discrimination.

“A decisive action by Russian parliamentarians to reject this discriminatory and shameful law will be a clear signal to number of Russian cities to follow suit and scrap their legislation targeting LGBTI people,” said Dalhuisen.