

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Public Statement

AI Index: EUR 51/001/2006 (Public)
News Service No: 214
15 August 2006

Estonia: The right to freedom of peaceful assembly must be protected

Published

On 12 August, participants in a Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Pride march in Tallinn were attacked by more than a dozen counter-demonstrators. More than ten participants in the march were injured and one person was hospitalized with head injuries. Amnesty International is concerned that the protection offered to the Pride march participants was not adequate and calls on the Estonian authorities to act under all circumstances with due diligence to protect LGBT people against violence.

The counter-demonstrators, who reportedly defined themselves as Estonian nationalists, physically and verbally attacked marchers, spat on them as well as throwing stones and eggs at them. The counter-demonstrators were able to attack the marchers without being stopped by law enforcement officials. Later in the evening, a window of an entertainment venue hosting Pride participants was smashed. Following the march, six counter-demonstrators have allegedly been arrested for “violating public order”.

The Estonian authorities provided insufficient numbers of law enforcement officials to protect the Pride marchers, and those who were present were not adequately identifiable to act as a deterrent from attacks. In this respect, Amnesty International reminds the Estonian authorities that under international and European law, Estonia is not only obliged to respect the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and freedom of expression, but also has a positive duty to take active measures to protect the march participants from attacks against them. The organization recommends the Estonian law enforcement agencies to act under all circumstances with due diligence to protect LGBT people against violence from the wider community. The authorities should also make clear that such violence is a criminal offence and will be prosecuted as such.

Amnesty International appreciates that the Estonian authorities have consistently permitted LGBT marches to take place and while appreciating that leading Estonian politicians do not make homophobic remarks and generally have a positive attitude toward the LGBT people and LGBT rights. However, following the violence at the Tallinn march, Amnesty International recommends the Estonian government to take concrete steps to increase awareness of, tolerance and respect for the human rights of LGBT people in Estonia.

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