

**AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL
PRESS RELEASE**

AI Index: PRE 01/145/2008
15 May 2008

Europe: Lesbians and gay men march with pride to end prejudice

Amnesty International calls on governments in Europe to secure the right of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people to celebrate their identity at a series of pride marches and other public events that take place each year between April and November.

“Equality before the law with no discrimination is the message that gay rights activists take to the streets. Yet more often than not they are prevented from doing so in safety,” said Nicola Duckworth, Europe and Central Asia Programme Director at Amnesty International.

In a number of countries, mainly in Eastern Europe, participants in pride events too often face threats and official hostility even before they march. They are jeered, spat at, and pummelled with bottles, eggs, excrement, and fists by protesters, sometimes while police look on.

On 11 May, 60 would-be participants sought to travel to the Moldovan capital in defiance of a ban a pride march – the sixth time such a ban had been imposed. There, at least three times as many protesters surrounded their bus, forced open the doors, and seized their banners and flags while police watched from half a dozen patrol cars parked nearby.

Even the Eurovision Song Contest to be held on 20-24 May in Belgrade is not safe from anti-gay protesters. In Serbia, where safety concerns have prevented the Gay-Straight Alliance from organizing a pride event, an extremist group had threatened violence against anyone they perceive as lesbian or gay at the event.

In a number of East European countries, some events are banned outright, in violation of international law. Authorities breach their obligations claiming security concerns and the violation of what they perceive as spiritual and moral values.

Amnesty International is campaigning for the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people to be free from physical and verbal attacks and threats; free to assemble and organise events; and be adequately protected by law enforcement officials.

At the end of this month for the second year running, Amnesty International activists from over 20 countries will take part in Riga’s pride march to display international support and solidarity. The march will be a test of how far respect for equality extends.

“Regardless of the obstacles thrown in their way, lesbian and gay activists are claiming their human rights. It is the duty of governments to deliver on their obligations,” Nicola Duckworth said.

For information on Riga Gay Pride Parade 2008, see <http://www.facebook.com/group.php?>

Further information

The Gay Pride march in Riga in 2005 was initially banned and then took place without adequate police protection. The 2006 march was banned and the authorities failed yet again to provide adequate police protection for the participants of an indoors meeting.

Last year over 400 people, including Amnesty International activists from across Europe, marched in a closed-off park in central Riga.

For the third year running this May, the Moscow city authorities have denied gay and lesbian activists permission to march. Appeals against the earlier bans are pending before the European Court of Human Rights.

In Croatia, groups will hold pride events in Zagreb at the end of June. In 2006 and 2007, even though the police officers assigned outnumbered the demonstrators by nearly two to one, they could not protect them from attacks during and after the marches.

In 2007, the mayor of Vilnius refused to give permission for an EU-sponsored anti-discrimination truck tour as part of a 'For Diversity. Against Discrimination' information campaign to make its planned stop in the capital of Lithuania. The Vilnius City Council also voted unanimously to ban a tolerance campaign rally in support of human rights of various groups, including the rights of lesbians and gay men. The European Commission criticized the bans.

Polish courts and the European Court of Human Rights found bans on pride events in Polish cities to be unlawful. The 2007 Warsaw parade drew a record 5,000 supporters and little protest, and a smaller march in Krakow went forward without major incident.

Croatia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Moldova, and Serbia were among 54 states that, in 2006, signed up to a statement at the UN Human Rights Council expressing “deep concern at these ongoing human rights violations [against lesbians, gay men, bisexual and transgender people]. The principles of universality and non-discrimination require that these issues be addressed.”