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## **Bosnia and Herzegovina: “Sarajevo Queer Festival” must be protected**

The authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina must guarantee a climate free of intimidation for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people, as they prepare for the first “Sarajevo Queer Festival”, Amnesty International said today. This festival of art and culture, which includes exhibitions, performances, public discussions and films, is planned to take place between 24 and 28 September 2008, and organized by a non-governmental organization called Udruženje Q.

"Gay rights activists will use this festival to take to the public their message for equality before the law and an end to discrimination. However, in the run-up to the festival, certain parts of the media are unleashing a homophobic campaign which further cultivates deeply entrenched prejudices and may incite violence around the event," said Nicola Duckworth, Europe and Central Asia Programme Director at Amnesty International.

Many publications, including the popular *SAFF* and *Dnevni Avaz*, have used derogatory language in relation to lesbian and gay people. They have called for the organizers of the festival to be lynched, stoned, doused with petrol or expelled from the country. Death threats have been issued on the Internet against individual gay rights activists. Appeals have also been made to the public to disrupt the festival.

"We do not feel safe for ourselves or for our families. Some of us had to find new accommodation because our names and addresses were made publicly known. We are afraid to use public transport or go out alone. Our dogs are our best protection at the moment. We feel isolated," an activist of Udruženje Q told Amnesty International.

Amnesty International strongly condemns the use of homophobic language by the media and calls for it to recognise its responsibility in fostering a climate of intolerance and to play a constructive role in dismantling prejudices.

"The authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina are obliged to safeguard the rights of lesbian and gay people to gather and express freely their views. They must promptly investigate all cases of direct threats against them and bring the perpetrators to justice," Nicola Duckworth said.

Amnesty International calls on the authorities to:

- Ensure the right of everyone to effectively exercise their right to freedom of peaceful assembly without discrimination;
- Publicly condemn, investigate and prosecute attacks, threats of attacks and other harassment of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people;
- Provide effective and adequate protection to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people who face threats to their lives and safety;
- Ensure that police officers are provided with specific directives and training on their duty to

protect the human rights of all individuals without discrimination.

### **Background**

The rights to peaceful assembly and to freedom of expression are recognized and protected by a number of international treaties to which Bosnia and Herzegovina is a party, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the European Convention for the protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.

Also important in this regard is a judgement of the European Court of Human Rights in the case of *Plattform "Ärzte für das Leben"* against Austria in which the Court stated that "A demonstration may annoy or give offence to persons opposed to the ideas or claims that it is seeking to promote. The participants must, however, be able to hold the demonstration without having to fear that they will be subjected to physical violence by their opponents; such a fear would be liable to deter associations or other groups supporting common ideas or interests from openly expressing their opinions on highly controversial issues affecting the community."