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Bosnia and Herzegovina: Failure to protect “Sarajevo Queer Festival”

The authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina must provide adequate security for the participants in the first “Sarajevo Queer Festival”, said Amnesty International after several people were attacked at the end of the first day of the festival. The authorities must also promptly and thoroughly investigate the attacks and bring those responsible to justice.

Eight people, policemen included, were reported to have been injured after dozens of young men attacked visitors to festival of art and culture, which opened on 24 September in the Academy of Fine Arts in the centre of the capital, Sarajevo.

According to the organizers of the four-day event (the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender non-governmental organization UdruÅ¾enje Q), police let anti-gay protestors get too close to the venue thus endangering the participants.

“The call of gay rights activists for equality before the law and an end to discrimination was met with intolerance and violence,” said Nicola Duckworth, Europe and Central Asia Programme Director at Amnesty International.

The organizers of the festival and their sympathisers, including journalists, have and continue to receive death threats. Homophobic posters are widely distributed and put in prominent places. Some media outlets have used homophobic language and misrepresented the aims of the festival.

In a letter to the Prime Minister of Bosnia and Herzegovina Nikola Špirić earlier this month, Amnesty International expressed concern at the increasing atmosphere of intimidation against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people in the country and called on him to ensure that their rights are protected.

To date, Amnesty International has not received an answer. The apparent lack of adequate measures by the authorities to guarantee an atmosphere free of intimidation and violence for the festival shows that the organization’s recommendations have not been heeded.

Amnesty International calls on political leaders at the highest level to condemn publicly the discrimination against individuals based on their actual or imputed sexual orientation and to make clear that any act of discrimination or violence, whoever the victim, will not be tolerated.

“Gay and lesbian people have the same rights as everybody else in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the authorities are obliged to guarantee their right to freedom of assembly and to freedom of expression,” Nicola Duckworth said.