

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

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Serbia must commit to ensure the protection of LGBTI people

Following an attack on the apartment of a prominent campaigner for the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) people, Amnesty International calls on the Serbian authorities, and in particular, the Minister of Interior, and Prime Minister, Ivica Dačić, to ensure that this hate crime is fully investigated and the perpetrators brought to justice.

On 27 October, Boban Stojanović went to his apartment in the Belgrade suburb of Cerak, and found two messages on his front door. The first read, “We know where you live. We know where you sleep”. It was signed by Combat 18, a neo-Nazi organization. The second was a photograph, showing the beating of a gay activist in Kiev, and a rainbow – the symbol of the LGBT movement – which was crudely crossed out. A swastika was spray painted on the nearby wall, and below it two crossed-out male symbols. Boban Stojanovic also found signs of burning on and around the bedroom window, which suggests that some form of incendiary device may have been thrown at the window.

Fortunately neither Boban Stojanović, nor his partner were in the apartment when the attack took place. He had not recently been living there for practical and safety reasons – he had previously been threatened, and his apartment targeted in April 2012.

Amnesty International notes that the police responded swiftly after Boban Stojanović reported the attack, and opened the investigation by collecting relevant evidence from the apartment.

Amnesty International urges police and prosecutors to ensure that this investigation is conducted, impartially, thoroughly and effectively, and any suspects identified should be brought to trial in fair proceedings. The investigation should duly take into account the evidence suggesting that this attack was motivated by the sexual orientation of Boban Stojanović and by his background as LGBTI human right defender. In view of this attack, the threats he has received in the past and his engagement as human right defender, Boban Stojanović should be provided with appropriate protection.

Serbia has recently adopted legislation against homophobic and transphobic hate crime. This is certainly a positive step that must be followed by adequate implementation. In particular, it is vital that investigating authorities use all the powers at their disposal to establish whether any crime is motivated by hatred.

This attack takes place less than a month since the authorities banned the Belgrade Pride for the third year running, again failing to guarantee the rights of LGBTI people in Serbia to freedom of expression and association. The government was accused of giving in to the extremists.

Amnesty International now calls on the government to seize this second chance to demonstrate that they are committed to the protection of the rights of the LGBTI individuals, and to commit all the relevant authorities to ensure that the perpetrators are brought to justice.

BACKGROUND

Boban Stojanović is the Executive director of Queeria – the Centre for Promoting a Culture of Non-Violence & Equality. He has campaigned for years, not only for LGBTI rights, including the right to hold the Pride, but against domestic violence and in the “Dealing with the Past” campaign.

The Serbian Assembly in December 2012, adopted an amendment to Article 54 of the Criminal Code, providing that for the consideration of crimes motivated by hate, to be considered an aggravating factor in sentencing. Article 54(a) states that , “If the offence was committed out of hatred because of race and religion, national or ethnic origin, gender, sexual orientation or gender identity another person, the court will appreciate the fact as an aggravating circumstance, unless it is not prescribed as an element of a criminal offence”.

End

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