

AI Index: PRE01/044/2013
25 January 2013

Russia's anti-gay 'propaganda law' assault on freedom of expression

Russia's Parliament has backed a bill which outlaws the "propaganda of homosexuality among minors" in a move that will restrict fundamental human rights and is in breach of the country's international obligations to protect lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) people from discrimination, Amnesty International said today.

The State Duma voted almost unanimously in favour of the controversial measure with only one parliamentarian against and another abstaining, during the first reading.

The law would make the "promotion of homosexuality among minors" an administrative offence in federal law, with fines of up to 500,000 roubles (US\$ 16,200).

"This law is an attack on the right to freedom of expression," said David Diaz-Jogeix, Europe and Central Asia Programme Deputy Director at Amnesty International.

There is no legal definition in the Russian law of what constitutes 'propaganda of homosexuality' and the law could be interpreted very loosely. They are going to punish people for something which is perfectly legitimate – expressing themselves, being themselves.

"This law further stigmatizes and alienates LGBTI people, including children, and will deprive them of information that could be crucial to their health," said Diaz-Jogeix.

"It perversely presumes that the moral, spiritual and psychological development of children is best served by denying them access to support and information that can help them make informed, autonomous and responsible decisions. This is an unjust law."

"Besides, this law will deny LGBTI people equality before the law by curtailing the activities of LGBTI activists, some of whom have already been harassed and assaulted."

LGBTI activists organized today a 'Kissing Day' protest in front of the Duma. Kissing couples were pelted with eggs and verbally abused by supporters of the law,. Police reportedly detained 20 LGBTI activists.

"The police yet again directed their actions with arguably excessive force towards the wrong people. The LGBTI activists were not a threat to anybody; they did not instigate hate or violence. They were there exercising their right to freedom of expression of their feelings towards one another. They are as entitled to this right and protection from violence as everyone else," Diaz-Jogeix added.