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Russia: Gay activists arrested despite being victims of violence

The failure of Moscow police to protect lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) protesters from physical attacks on Saturday reinforces an impression of state sanctioned violence and discrimination, Amnesty International said.

In events monitored by Amnesty International, at least 30 LGBTI protesters were detained by police in three locations in the centre of Moscow: in front of Parliament, the Mayor's Office and Gorky Park.

The activists were attempting to hold pickets to protest against homophobic laws, including a draft federal law banning the so-called "propaganda of homosexuality" and to attract attention to the persisting discrimination and violence against LGBTI people in the country.

"Instead of detaining peaceful LGBTI demonstrators, the Russian authorities should protect them from extremist attacks based on discriminatory attitudes held by some," said David Diaz-Jogeix, Amnesty International's Deputy Programme Director for Europe and Central Asia.

The failure to protect the activists from violent attacks by counter-protesters and to prosecute those responsible for violence against LGBTI people is a breach of Russia's international human rights obligations.

"These attacks against peaceful demonstrators should be promptly investigated, including the legal basis of the police to detain peaceful demonstrators," said Diaz-Jogeix.

"If no action is taken by the authorities to protect LGBTI people and perpetrators of violent attacks against LGBTI continue to enjoy impunity, this might be perceived by some as state sanctioned violence and discrimination."

All three events were marred by physical violence and beatings of LGBTI protesters. One of the LGBTI activists was attacked by a group of counter-protesters, beaten and sprayed with pepper gas before the police intervened and detained him. He required medical assistance for his injuries.

The police yet again failed to prevent the violence and protect the peaceful LGBTI protesters. Moreover, the number of detained LGBTI activists was apparently larger than that of the perpetrators of the attacks.

Such incidents of violence against LGBTI activists are now frequent, as is the failure of the police to meet its obligations to investigate such attacks and hold the perpetrators accountable.

Even in cases where the perpetrators are identified and detained no action is taken, despite eye-witnesses statements and in some cases photo and video evidence of the attacks.

LGBTI activists had formally notified the authorities of their intention to organize LGBTI Pride marches for 25 May in Moscow, the town of Khimki in the Moscow region and in Kostroma. However, in all three

cases the local authorities refused to grant their approval of the planned peaceful assemblies of LGBTI people, on grounds not coherent with Russia's international obligations.

LGBTI activists attempted to challenge the refusal in the relevant courts of law, but the courts upheld the respective bans, despite the earlier judgment of the European Court of Human Rights concerning the Pride marches in Russia and finding a violation of the right to peaceful assembly, freedom of expression and discrimination.

The violence on Saturday is set against a background of persistence violence directed against LGBTI people. This includes the recent murders in Volgograd and attacks in Irkutsk, reportedly motivated by homophobia.

Local and federal authorities' legal and administrative initiatives effectively fuel discriminatory attitudes and violence against LGBTI people, instead of protecting the fundamental human rights of all people.

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