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Bulgarian authorities must investigate attack against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender rights activists

On 18 June, following the Sofia Pride march, five Pride volunteers were attacked by a group of unknown perpetrators. Three of them suffered minor injuries. The LGBT rights activists suspect that the attackers followed them as they were leaving the Pride.

“This was obviously a hate crime, but the police is not able address it as such. This is the biggest problem,” one of the activists, Kaloyan Stanev told Amnesty International.

As the Bulgarian Criminal Code does not recognize sexual orientation as one of the grounds motivating a crime, the five Pride volunteers are concerned that the hate motivation may not be adequately addressed.

Hate crimes represent a particular affront to human dignity and need to be promptly, independently, impartially and thoroughly investigated and those responsible must be brought to justice.

Amnesty International urges the authorities to publicly condemn the attack and to express their support to the LGBT rights activists.

“Do we have to wait for someone to get killed to realize that there is a problem? We got out easily, but the next time, there might be somebody who would not be so lucky,” one of the activists, Svetoslav Pashov told Amnesty International.

The assault took place in the centre of Sofia after the five Pride volunteers had walked for approximate 45 minutes and had left the secured, by the police, area of the Pride.

One of the activists called the police who arrived immediately at the location. The activists then went to the police to report the assault. They stated that they were attacked because they were LGBT rights activists and that the assault was a hate crime. They told Amnesty International that the police will investigate the crime. However, they said that they were not offered any form of victim support or to be escorted back to their homes.

“This is not an isolated incident. During the past four years, gangs in central areas of Sofia have been beating up people who “looked gay”. However, this has not led to any measures by the authorities to ensure the protection of lesbians, gay men, bisexuals and transgender people in Bulgaria, and to prevent similar hate crimes,” said one of the attacked LGBT rights activists, Dimitar Dimitrov.

More than 1,000 participants attended the fourth Sofia Pride march on 18 June. The march was adequately protected by the police and organizers were satisfied with the police cooperation and safety provided for the celebration of the rights of LGBT individuals in Bulgaria.

The organizers of Sofia Pride urged the authorities to provide effective and adequate protection to LGBT individuals in Bulgaria as a matter of urgency.